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The Dissertation Committee for Deana Jill Allen Scott certifies that this is the approved  
version of the following dissertation:

What's in their backpacks: Pre-kindergartners' literacy practices from home to school  
and back

**Committee:**

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Christopher P. Brown, Supervisor

---

Melissa Mosley

---

Diane Schallert

---

Stuart Reifel

---

Jo Worthy

What's in their backpacks: Pre-kindergartners' literacy practices from home to school  
and back

**by**

**Deana Jill Allen Scott, B.S.; M.S.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin  
December 2010**

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my family and fellow adventure takers

## Acknowledgements

This has been a true adventure. Participating in adventures is a family concept developed mainly from situations that we found ourselves in – both fun and difficult. We make the conscious decision to turn challenges into **adventures** to enjoy. Along this adventure there have been many important people who made this possible. I would like to give special thanks and recognition to the following important people in my life.

My husband—Bruce—who has led me on many adventures and I eagerly await the next one.

My children—Courtney, Lauren, and Jeremy—who have always thought I can do anything and pushed me to do it. They are also the reasons for many of my adventures.

My grandchildren—Jackson and Emma—who think all grandmothers have books and papers everywhere and go to school, but have no doubt as to who comes first. They are my adventure leaders in training.

My sister—Mary Jane—who has always been willing to help me no matter what, no matter when, no matter where, or no matter why.

My friends from Corpus Christi, especially Becky and Molly, who believe in me even when I don't.

My Northside family, especially Bernice, who made sure I went to class and studied. The support and encouragement they gave me was the fuel for this adventure.

My participant teachers in this study who unselfishly shared their teaching practice.

My family participants who opened their lives to me in hopes of making a difference.

My students—Sonia, Lily, Marcos, Jeffrey, Israel, and Robin—who were just themselves. They were at the heart of this adventure.

My Friendly Frogs group who provided support, direction, and confidence without which I would have not made it. Their reading, editing, and continued encouragement made driving, no matter how far, the right thing to do.

My professors at UT who made me think. Think in ways and to depths that I had never done before. Their insight, professionalism, and encouragement made me realize there are so many questions to be answered.

My Dissertation committee—Dr. Worthy, Dr. Mosley, Dr. Riefel, Dr. Schallert—for investing in my education. By sharing their time, their knowledge, and their expertise with me they made this work possible.

And lastly, Chris Brown, who understood what I wanted to do even when I wasn't sure. He patiently kept me focused and moving along. His intelligence, honesty, willingness to share, and genuineness impressed me through this adventure.

Since adventures usually lead into other new adventures, I do not see this as a conclusion, but just a beginning of another new **Adventure**, whatever that might be.

**What's in their backpacks: Pre-kindergartners' literacy practices from home to school and back**

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Deana Jill Allen Scott, Ph. D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Christopher P. Brown

Pre-kindergarten students often arrive the first day of school carrying a backpack filled with supplies which they are eager to use. Inside these backpacks are scissors, glue, and crayons. This study proposes that the pre-kindergartners are also carrying another backpack, their literacy backpack holding all of their literacy skills and practices that they use every day at home. This qualitative case study examined these literacies brought from home in the students' figurative literacy backpacks. The study also focused on their teachers' literacy views and practices. The study was conducted in three parts. First, through field observations and interviews with parents, the literacy practices occurring at home were identified and examined. Unique "literacy stories" were crafted from the data for each of the pre-kindergartners and shared with their parents. Part two of the study examined the two pre-kindergarten teachers' literacy practices through semi-structured interviews. The impact of external forces (e.g. state and federal mandates, school curriculum, grant requirements, and trainings) on the views and practices of the

pre-kindergarten teachers was discussed. These external forces stress the development of formal literacies, thus modeling a narrow definition of literacy. Part three of the study focused on sharing the students' "literacy stories" with their teachers and examining the teachers' reactions to the stories. Data from the interviews following reading the stories pointed to the teachers' acknowledging the multiple literacies found in the homes of their students and a desire to learn more about their families' literacy practices in order to utilize them in the classroom. The students' "literacy stories" proved to be a valuable tool in expanding the teachers' definition of literacy. The stories helped the teachers broaden their views of literacy to include literacy practices that occur in many different cultural and social contexts; adopting a definition more in line with the socio-cultural development of literacy and the NLS concepts (Street, 2003). Using this definition, multiple literacies will be made visible in the classrooms and connections from home to school can be made allowing students to strengthen their existing literacies and expand them to incorporate other literacies.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **CONTEXT**

Policymakers at all levels of government are promoting educational reforms that are intended to improve student achievement. Many of these policies, e.g. the federal government's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), result in most states, including Texas, using high-stakes assessments to motivate students, teachers, and administrators to achieve. Although the testing systems typically do not go into effect until third grade, as is the case in Texas, the effects are felt in all grade levels, including pre-kindergarten. Genishi and Dyson (2009) state that because of this pressure for accountability in education "the terrain of early childhood classrooms has been notably eroded" (p. 3) by moving away from a focus on developing the whole child to classrooms that focus on developing children's academic skills. In fact, policymakers are promoting the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs with the promise of improving the academic success of students in elementary school (Stipek, 2006; Lamy, Barnett, and Jung, 2005). Thus, the emphasis for pre-kindergarten instruction shifts from social, cognitive, and emotional development to the teaching of early academics skills.

Literacy skills make up a large portion of the academic skills taught in early elementary school. These early literacy skills are considered one of the most important indicators of academic success by many educators (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). To date, this focus has primarily been on measurable literacy skills and overlooks many of the essential components students should develop to become literate (Neuman & Roskos 2005). Literacy has been defined simply as the decoding and writing skills children need to achieve on tests in school. However, Au and Raphael (2000) point out that "the literacy that is measured by achievement tests is but one among several

literacies that students are learning” (p. 170). Acknowledging multiple types of literacies as important to students’ success broadens what it means to be literate. Genishi and Dyson (2009) note that children come from widely diverse families and social groups “that have their own rhythm, tempo and volume level, their own amount of communication and interchange” (p. 3). The diversity of the children’s experiences produces a wide variety of home literacy skills that need to be included in early childhood educators’ construct of literacy. Teachers including these multiple home literacy practices that young children bring with them to school in their classroom practices can produce opportunities for students to expand existing literacy skills and add new skills. Currently, knowledge about literacy practices in the homes of public pre-kindergarten students is not readily available for teachers, which makes building these connections from home to school more difficult.

## **THE STUDY**

To provide these bridges for pre-kindergarten students, teachers, and other educators must have specific knowledge of the home literacies of the students in their classrooms. Most of the previous research that focuses on home and school literacies with children before entering first grade has been with Head Start or kindergarten students. Few studies have been conducted with pre-kindergarten students in public school classes; specifically students who are eligible for state pre-kindergartens because of low socio-economic status (LSES).

This study addressed this gap by examining the literacy practices in the homes of six pre-kindergarten students and their teachers’ practices and understanding of literacy in a small school district’s pre-k program in Texas. Focusing on public school pre-kindergarten students is significant because of the increased number of pre-kindergarten

programs within elementary schools across the United States (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007; Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

Developing an understanding of the multiple literacies that these children develop at home is an important step to providing meaningful instruction for students (Moll et al., 1992). Teachers often strive to know their students and their families, but often fall short of utilizing this information to guide their instruction. Specifically, by identifying and understanding various home literacies, teachers can begin to develop relationships to future literacy learning in the classroom. Furthermore, by examining the teachers' literacy practices and the impact of learning about their students' home "literacy stories," insights will be added to the research on how teachers and early educators can utilize home literacies to build bridges from home to school.

In this study, I use a socially constructed view of literacy to identify these pre-kindergarteners' various home literacies. Building on Vygotsky's theory that learning takes place not in isolation, but is constructed in social situations with the help of others, home literacies practices were examined in the social situations or domains they occurred, paying close attention to the interactions of the students and other family members. The construct of literacy used in this dissertation includes not only skills such as reading and writing, but all events or practices that take place around interactions that include oral and written texts (Barton, 1990; Heath, 1983). Heath (1983) referred to literacy events generally as being "when talk revolves around a piece of writing" and also as situations "where literacy has an integral role" (1983, p. 71). Specifically, home literacy, often called family literacy, is any opportunity parents and children have to interact with oral or written texts within their home context (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). Some of these home literacies include school-type or formal literacies such as storybook reading, learning letters, or workbooks. Other home literacies are informal and revolve



around bill paying, grocery shopping, conversations, media experiences, or singing.(Purcell-Gates,1996). Children can be more successful in one type of literacy than another. By looking closely at all of the literacy practices that the children engage in, educators can utilize the skills in one literacy practice to help develop skills in another (Haney & Hill, 2004). Valuing home literacy allows educators to create bridges between the students' existing literacies and those that are necessary to achieve academic literacies, and therefore be successful in the school arena.

After I identified the home literacy practices of these pre-kindergarten students, I shared this information with their pre-k teachers. I did so because it is important to examine how teachers and educators might use this information to help their students achieve success in school. I argue that simply making these literacies “visible” is only one step in assisting pre-k students in developing the skills for school success. The other step includes studying how pre-kindergarten teachers understand and use this information about the literacy practices that their students bring with them to the classroom.

In states such as Texas, teachers do not entirely control their instructional decision-making. In addition to their own personal and professional understandings, , their instructional decision are guided by multiple influences, including federal and state policies such as NCLB, social contexts, state and federal grants, and research (Teale, et al., 2010). Teale, Hoffman and Paciga (2010) have concerns with the National Emergent Literacy Panel's (NELP) definition of literacy, which places an emphasis on narrow, precursor skills and how that will influence instruction in early childhood classrooms. For example, by NELP's stressing the importance of literacy skills such as Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN) of letters and RAN of objects/colors, these literacies will be valued by schools and teachers over other valuable, more informal literacy skills and practices (Teale et al., 2010, Dickinson, et al., 2009).

Privileging of academic skills over other literacy skills in schools specifically affects students from homes of diverse literacy backgrounds, including those students from LSES households. Au and Raphael (2000) argued that students in these households are less likely to engage in school-type skill development, but do have rich literacy practices. Schools are missing opportunities for scaffolding school-type skills through using the students' existing literacies. In Texas pre-k classrooms, this problem has the potential to be amplified because pre-kindergarten is a program designed around the education of children the state identifies as being at risk for school success. Little or no research has been done on how teachers understand and utilize home literacies to help pre-kindergarten students become school literate. By examining the home literacies of a group of public school pre-kindergarteners and their teachers' views and understanding of these literacy practices, this study adds to current research and helps to fill the gap in the literature.

## **THE DISSERTATION**

This dissertation presents the results of the study of six focal pre-kindergarten students in a public school setting and their teachers. I conducted the study reported in this dissertation in three parts. First, I examined the home literacy practices of a sample of public school pre-kindergarten children in order to identify specific practices the children engage in away from school. The field observations began in October and continued into March. Second, I examined the teachers' literacy views and practices. In the third part of this study, I shared the findings about each of the focal children with their teacher. The teachers were then interviewed to see how they could see this information adding to their classroom practices. The following questions guided this study:

1. What literacy events and practices take place in the homes and immediate communities of a sample of low SES pre-kindergarten children in a rural Texas school district?
2. What is the focus of the teachers' literacy instructions and the underlying constructs including their views on home and school type literacies?
3. How do teachers see their practices being impacted by the identification of particular home literacies of their students through the literacy stories?

I begin the remaining chapters in this dissertation by providing a review of the relevant literature in the areas of literacy, home-school connections, and cultural relevance in chapter two. These areas of study served the basis for the development my research questions. Included in this chapter is my outline of the conceptual framework that guided my work. This framework incorporates two theoretical perspectives—Vygotsky's socio-cultural constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) and the New Literacy Studies (NLS) socio-cultural perspective on literacy (Street, 2003; Barton, 1994, Gee, 2004). Chapter 3 focuses on the qualitative case study methodology I used to conduct my investigation. Included in this chapter is a brief outline of the historical context of the small rural town where the study took place, as well as demographic and biographical information on the families and teachers who participated in this investigation.

Chapters 4 and 5 report the findings from the study. Chapter 4 provides the data from the research with the students and their families. Home literacy events and practices were identified and discussed in detail, including how these practices had connections to various literacy practices that the students would encounter in pre-kindergarten classrooms. Chapter 5 discusses data from the two interviews in which each teacher participated. The first interview provided opportunities for the teachers to

articulate their definition and views of literacy, how they developed their literacy understandings, and how it was included in their classroom. The second interview, which was conducted after the teachers read their students' literacy stories, gave the teachers opportunities to share their reaction to the stories. .

Chapter 6 discusses the trends and implications from the identification of the home literacy events and the teachers' literacy views and practices. I also address the findings and implications from the data on the teachers' views on literacy and literacy instruction as well as their reactions to the literacy stories. I then note the limitations of this study and finally, I discuss recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

In this section, I review the literature in several areas of early childhood research that led me to my research questions. First, I review the information about the different perspectives on early literacy. This literature provides a historical perspective and helps the reader understand the different lenses used in the study to examine how children develop literacy. Second, I examine the research on the home-school connections, focusing specifically on home literacies. As part of this examination, I review the literature that examines the need for teachers to use culturally responsive teaching methods for diverse student populations. Finally, I examine policies and trends in education that directly affect pre-kindergarten programs, including literacy instruction.

### **Literature Review**

#### **LITERACY DEVELOPMENT**

In reviewing research on literacy for the past several decades, a number of different theoretical lenses emerged that have been used to examine the early literacy development of children. These lenses include reading readiness, emergent literacy, and socio-cultural literacies. I examine the evolution of these lenses to provide a complex conception of literacy development. Moreover, identifying and defining each of these theories of literacy development provides a set of markers that I will use to identify my research subjects' conceptions of this construct.

#### **Reading Readiness**

Both maturational and developmental theories learning are present in the lens of reading readiness. Barratt-Pugh and Rohl (2008) describe the theory behind reading

readiness as a “joint process of biological maturation and environmental influence” (p. 3). During the first part of the nineteenth century, educators believed that in order for children to learn to read, they had to have a specific level of maturity which was brought about by a biological process (Gesell, 1954). Developmental theory added a new dimension to premises on how children learn to read, including that children needed to reach a certain maturational level to learn to read. However, there were experiences that would enhance or hasten the process of learning to read (Durkin, 1966; Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2008). This perspective was referred to as ‘reading readiness.’

Beginning in the early 1960’s, readiness dominated early literacy development constructs over the next decades (Teale & Yokota, 2000; Christie, 1998). Stallman & Pearson (1990) define reading readiness as the perspective in which young children must reach a specific age before formal instruction in reading can take place. To determine if children had reached this level of maturity, they were given “readiness” tests (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2008). This testing dictated when reading instruction began. For most children, this meant that reading instruction did not usually begin until first grade. Christie (1998) adds that “scholars used to believe that children learned very little about reading and writing until age five or six, when they entered school and began to receive formal instruction” (p. 50).

The predominant idea was that once children were old enough, their teachers would teach them how to read and write (Teale & Yokota, 2000; Christie, 1998). This placed the context for learning to read in the first grade classroom. Instruction in pre-schools and kindergarten focused on isolated pre-reading skill development, such as letter recognition, sounds of the letters, and learning sight words. Direct instruction was the primary method of teaching, and the role of the family and community was to support the teachers by being involved in specific programs designed by the school.

According to Teale and Yokoto (2000), by the late 1980's, the notion of reading readiness in literacy instruction was beginning to be seriously challenged. Researchers and teachers began to move away from a maturationist view of learning to a more constructivist method of learning to read (Korat, 2005, Neuman & Dickinson, 2001). They began looking at literacy development as a broader term for young children's learning related to reading and writing. Teale and Yokoto (2000) refer to literacy as no longer being considered strictly reading, but reading, writing, and oral language. The home literacies and early learning of children, not previously seen as part of the reading process, were now to play a part in early literacy (Cairney, 2003). Researchers during this time period such as Clay, Goodman, and Smith suggested that reading and writing were not skills learned in isolation, but learned as part of an ongoing process that began at birth and continued throughout life (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2008).

### **Emergent Literacy**

This new lens for understanding literacy and reading development is a process-based approach that has been labeled "emergent literacy." Marie Clay first coined the phrase "emergent literacy" in her 1966 dissertation research (Adams, 1990). Using the concept of emergent literacy, researchers expand the concept of literacy from simply reading to reading, writing, and oral language based on theories and findings that all three develop simultaneously in a literate environment (Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Cairney, 2000; Neuman & Dickinson, 2003; Bennett, Weigel, and Martin, 2000). Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) articulate that the important element of emergent literacy that differentiated it from the reading readiness approach was the emphasis on a developmental continuum of literacy acquisition. Neuman and Dickinson (2003) herald emergent literacy as the new framework for understanding the processes underlying children's acquisition of language. It is also noted that this focus on studying emergent

literacy comes with many challenges. The most important being the establishment of a clear understanding of emergent literacy development in children so that “literacy achievement can be a right and not a privilege for all children” (Neuman & Dickinson, 2003, p. 3). Researchers and educators accepting emergent literacy as their framework no longer look at only the specific pre-reading skills that children need to develop before they can be taught to read, but instead look at how these and other language and literacy skills develop in homes and schools. Emergent literacy, based on Piaget’s theory that children actively construct their learning, emphasizes that reading, writing, and oral language develop over time through their participation in literacy activities both at school and at home (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2008).

Researchers who view literacy as an emergent process argue that the development of literacy knowledge cannot be fully understood without being aware of the contexts in which literacy was experienced (Mason & Allen, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1990; Gunn, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1998). Teale & Sulzby argue that reading and writing are learned simultaneously and develop in natural environments such as the home. Neuman and Celano (2001), in their study on two low socio-economic status (LSES) and two middle socio-economic status (MSES) communities, found that the home environments which had print resources had a positive impact on the children’s development of literacy skills. Furthermore, Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) found that exposure to books in the homes other environments had a positive impact on the language and literacy skills of pre-schoolers. Mason & Allen add to the importance of books in the home in their study, which argues that it is simply the act of reading books in the home, not the number of books, that has positive influence on children’s literacy development. This turn from readiness skills taught in school to emergent literacy taught in multiple environments led researchers to look closely at literacy in homes.



Some researchers' approach to examining emergent literacy in the home focuses on the print-literacy environment of young children and school-like activities in the home. Other researchers take a more ethnographic approach and are interested in children's early literacy skills and the contexts in which they develop. Findings from both types of studies inform researchers about the role of contexts (i.e., culture, community, and family) in early literacy development and the kind of literacy knowledge children typically acquire during preschool years (van Kleeck, 1990).

Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) view the home environment as one of the single most important variables in a child's emergent literacy. These authors argue that the linguistically rich home environment is the most powerful contributor to the early development of literacy skills. They point out the importance of reading storybooks and engaging with print as meaningful activities in the homes. Although researchers were beginning to acknowledge the importance on the home, they continued to emphasize the particular literacy skills which were reflected in the classrooms, again privileging mainstream groups (Au & Raphael, 2000). For example, Stainthorp and Hughes (2000) stress that children who are in literate home environments in ways which closely match the school environment have an advantage when they begin school. Baker and Serpell (1999) further argue the importance of home environments being more school like to help students develop literacy skills. The value is being placed on specific school-type literacies such as storybook reading and direct instruction of letters, rather than home literacies such as play, errand running, and list makings. Morrow (1993) strengthens this idea by pointing out that there is a "strong link between home environment and children's acquisition of school-based literacy" (p. 1992).

While researchers have identified the home environment as an important link to success in school-type literacy development the environments that are discussed are those

that are more aligned to the school environment. By valuing environments that provide children with these school-type literacy experiences, children from homes that provide literacy experiences that do not mimic school are seen to have a disadvantage, which can be addressed by making their home environments more school like.

### **Viewing children's opportunities**

Children from low socio-economic status (LSES) homes often do not have as many opportunities with these school-based activities either at home or at school (Duke, 2000, Zygouris-Coe, 2001). Duke (2000) studied the differences in print environments and experiences offered to first grade children in 20 different classrooms representing LSES students and very high socio-economic status (HSES) students. Duke collected data from these classrooms on four different visits, recording any activity during the day that involved print in any way. Duke (2000) found that a child in a LSES classroom experiences less exposure to print and books and limited time working with adults at school. An example of this lack of opportunity is often related to the minimized amount of time some LSES students spend in storybook reading. For example, Adams (1990) in examining the amount of storybook reading that children experience at home before first grade reported that children from LSES families have been read to a total of 25 hours in contrast to their middle socio-economic (MSES) counterparts who have between 1,500 and 1,000 total hours of storybook time. Researchers often point to this lack of storybook reading as an important factor in the achievement gap between MSES students and LSES students (Zygouris-Coe, 2001, Adams, 1990). Similarly, the work of Hart and Risley (1996) on the different levels in vocabulary of children from LSES and MSES homes shows the substantial difference in the number of words heard per hour in LSES homes (616) versus the number of words heard per hour in homes of MSES homes (2,153). Hart & Risley argue that emphasis should be placed on working with children during their first

three years of life at a time when they are dependent on their family and most receptive to learning (Hart & Risley, 2003). They continue to say that interventions must focus on not just the lack of skills, but the entire approach and experiences in the homes (Hart & Risley, 2003). This overwhelming difference in language in the homes and call for intervention experiences points to a gap in the school-type literacies, again privileging students from homes that mirror the school environments.

Haney and Hill (2004) specifically state that research is needed to empower children's families to be the best literacy supporters they can be. Cairney & Ruge (1999) assert that this aim to empower parents to provide school-like literacy activities points to "new applications of deficit views on learning where it was important to 'fix' the home environments" (Cairney & Ruge, quoting Auerbach (1989), 1999, p. 27). Many home literacy programs emerged from this desire by researchers to provide school-type literacies in the homes of all students. In her research, Marsh (2003) called these one-way programs where information went from school to home, but none from home to school. While acknowledging the importance of young children's learning at home, researchers and educators zeroed in on the absence of school-type literacies in the home and ignored the presence of other literacies.

### **Socio-cultural**

Researchers who see literacy as a more complex act than a simple set of school-based skills have worked to push past this idea of changing the home literacy environment of children from diverse backgrounds to acknowledging and utilizing these diverse home environments to support] children's literacy development (Au & Raphael, 2000). The social-cultural lens of literacy incorporates Vygotsky's social construction theory of learning and Bourdieu's "cultural capital" theory (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2008). For instance, Luke (1993) contends that young children are continually constructing new

literacies which provide them with cultural capital. Luke (1993) continues to argue that their cultural capital is developed from different forms of literacy and in different contexts where literacy takes place. He adds that the literacy practices that some children participate in “may not be valued in formal learning context” (p. 7). This socio-cultural perspective enables early childhood professionals to examine the “way patterns of inequality are constructed and maintained and explores ways of teaching literacy which expose and challenge this inequality, as part of children’s developing literacy competence” (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, p. 4, 2008). A socio-cultural approach to literacy recognizes that literacy practices take place in many contexts, are carried out for specific purposes, and that homes and communities are important contexts for the development of young children’s multiple literacies.

Several studies examining emergent literacy began to recognize the homes of all children as positive environments where literacy practices were being carried out in culturally specific ways and contributing to the children’s identity and literacies. The shift from looking at what we need to teach parents to do in their families to looking at what family literacy activities already embrace illustrates a socio-cultural approach in early literacy development. The socio-cultural view of literacy differs from the reading readiness approach where all the teaching is done at school by placing literacy development in multiple contexts. The socio-cultural perspective expands on the emergent literacy view by valuing other literacy contexts for what they provide rather than seeking to change a context to match the school literacy environment. Auerbach (1989) argues that “researchers ...review the growing body of evidence that many low-income, minority, and immigrant families cultivate rich (though perhaps not school-like) contexts for literacy development and that they, indeed support family literacy with exceptional effort and imagination” (p. 27). Instead of looking for home literacies that

parallel school-type literacies, researchers began identifying literacies in the home, how children engaged in these literacy practices, and how these literacies could be integrated into instructional practices in the schools.

Purcell-Gates (1996) and Green, Lily, and Garnett (2002) are among the scholars that moved toward a more contextual look at emergent literacy. Purcell-Gates (1996) researched beginning literacy development within the context of the home and community. Her definition of literacy is children's understanding of the language system that they developed through experience with their own culture. Purcell-Gates' (1996) findings point to the idea that children from low-social economic homes "are learners and do learn about the ways in which written language functions to the degree to which they experience it in their lives" (p. 427). Similarly, a study by Green et al. (2002) examined the ways children's books are shared with their families and how the responses to this book sharing affect the children's literacy skills. Twelve children in 11 families recruited from local preschools were asked to participate in the study. Using interviews, home observations, and journal entries as data, Green et al. (2002) documented the importance of adult-child interaction with storybook reading to help make connections from literature to real life. In this study, the researchers' definition of literacy is how children learn to make sense of both oral and written language in the social context of their family (Green et al., 2002). Together, these two studies show the movement among literacy researchers to broaden the definition of literacy to include not only school-type literacies, but more natural literacy practices that occur in the homes and communities of students.

Another example in the literature of studying the contextual and social aspects of developing literacy can be found in Heath's (1983) ethnographical look at the two communities of Trackton and Roadville. Heath (1983) stresses the concept of language as a socially positioned skill. She argues that "the different ways children learn to use

language are dependent on the ways in which each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization” (p. 11). Heath continues to say that cultural milieu affects the ways in which children learn to use language and thus, develop differing literacies. Heath (1983) shows the importance of different literacies or practices through her descriptions of the children engaging in learning language in different domains.

Similarly, Au and Raphael (2000) argue that literacy is socially constructed over time in homes as part of their culture and should be viewed as an ongoing process (p. 173). This shift from looking for school-type activities in families to studying literacy practices in families as they occur moves the study of early literacy development in young children into the socio-cultural domain. Gee (2000) refers to this consideration of literacy as a social process that occurs in contexts such as families and communities as a “social turn” in the study of literacy. This social turn makes the interaction, contexts, and experiences more important than the individual skills. Individual activities and skill development are respected and considered important, but the socio-cultural interaction must also be included in the understanding of literacy development. This perspective moves away from considering literacy as “an individual’s collection of technical skills learned through academic involvement to a focus on the existence of multiple literacies” (Howell, 2007, p. 1). It is important to note that learning the necessary skills for reading, such as decoding, is also valued, but is only one aspect of literacy (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2008; McNaughton, 1995).

Using a socio-cultural approach, researchers began to more closely examine the social contexts of literacy development instead of skill development (Au and Raphael, 2000; Green et al., 2002; Gee, 1991). This new focus of considering literacy a social

practice rather than a simple acquisition of skills has been termed the “New Literacy Studies” (NLS) (Gee, 1991, Street, 1996, Street, 2003). NLS builds on Vygotsky’s learning theory that learning is not created in isolation, but is socially constructed by focusing on the particular contexts in which the literacy events occur and the cultural and social aspects that surround these events. Defining literacy not as a set of specific skills, but a set of practices that are co-constructed in the contexts of everyday living uses both the theories of Vygotsky and the NLS together to form much of the conceptual framework for my dissertation study. The next section will look at the literature on the home-school connection, including the connections used in the readiness, emergent, and socio-cultural perspectives of literacy development.

#### **HOME-SCHOOL LITERACY CONNECTIONS**

The underlying question that researchers have about early literacy development is how to explain the persistent disparities in school literacy achievement among various groups of students (Carrington & Luke, 2003). Researchers turn to home-school literacy connections for insight. They look at ways in which schools are working with families to help students develop the necessary skills needed to be successful. Two contrasting frameworks emerged in the literature—developmental/cognitive and ethnographic/socio-cultural (Carrington & Luke, 2003). The developmental/cognitive view uses more of a deficit model, focusing on changing the home environments to match the school environments. The second view, ethnographic/socio-cultural, produces a model for home programs that is more additive, focusing on valuing the existing literacies and using them to build upon. I first review some of the literature that looks at home-school connections from the developmental/cognitive view. I then review literature that examines early literacy acquisition from an ethnographic/socio-cultural view.

## **Developmental/cognitive**

The developmental/cognitive approach to home-school literacy connections emphasizes teaching parents ways to help their children improve specific school-type literacies. These programs view learning literacy as an emergent process that is built on specific skill development. Both the reading readiness and the emergent literacy perspectives on literacy development support this approach to working with families. Researchers argue that a deficit in the practices of the family is partly to blame for the lack of achievement of diverse groups of children (Snow et al., 1998; Carrington & Luke, 2003). Specifically, research faults families for not reading enough, having limited print resources, not valuing literacy, or not modeling it effectively (Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Mason & Allen, 1986; White, 1982).

Hart and Risley (1995) examined the role of verbal interactions in the home. In their findings, they suggest that poor and uneducated families provide fewer language experiences than middle-class families. This, according to Hart and Risley (1995), results in lower vocabulary scores and a risk factor for success in reading. Adams (1990) and Snow et al. (1998) contend that in order to prevent reading difficulties for at-risk children, the quantity and quality of interactions young children have with their parents and other caring adults must increase. Purcell-Gates (1986), points out that parents do not foster “implicit knowledge of the intentionality of print, story structure and the linguistic register of written language which is dependent upon extensive exposure to written language in many different forms during the pre-school years” (p. 19).

Using this concept of home literacy practices, the solution for those children who lack many of the school-type literacies needed to succeed academically involves creating home-school programs that work on making children’s homes more school like (Carrington & Luke, 2003) and help parents engage in more ‘teacher-like’ activities. The



following studies are examples of early literacy interventions that attempt to change home environments to help the students achieve more skills.

Jordan et al. (2000) examined parent training and its effects on children's literacy skills in Title I schools' Project EASE. Parents were trained in parent-child interactions, how to discuss books, and ways to have vocabulary-enriching interactions. The results showed an enthusiasm among parents which, in turn, resulted in improved skills in language development for their kindergarten children, specifically children who scored low on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Revised (PPVT-R) at the beginning of the year.

Haney and Hill (2004), in their study of 47 preschool children ages three to five, researched the types of literacy skills that parents attempted to teach their children. The effectiveness of parents directly teaching these skills is one of the main focuses of their work. Children were given subtests from the Kaufman Survey of Early Academic Language Skills and the Test of Early Reading Ability. Using these data and data from a parent survey, the authors concluded that children who received direct teaching activities from their parents scored significantly higher than those who did not (Haney & Hill, 2004).

Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) conducted a five year longitudinal study on the impact of early parental involvement. They followed 168 middle- and upper middle-class students from kindergarten through third grade. They concluded that both formal and informal teaching at home resulted in a positive impact on students' literacy development. They also concluded that socio-economic status did not affect the positive effect of parental involvement. They argue that interventions that were directed specifically at intentional activities were the most successful. That is, interventions that

helped parents learn to work with their children on school-type literacies showed the most improvement in the child's literacy skills at school.

Baker, Sonnenschein and Serpell's (1999) study used the recommendations from the International Reading Association/National Association for the Education of Young Children (IRA/NAEYC) position statement on early reading as markers to study 54 diverse families from preschool to third grade. This position statement contains eight tenets of early reading, including shared book reading, frequent and varied oral language experiences, encouraging self-initiated interactions with print, library visits, value of literacy demonstrated in everyday life, promoting children's motivation for literacy, fostering pride and self-efficacy in literacy, and fostering parent communication with teachers and involvement in school. The results showed that the majority of parents engaged in many of these recommended practices. However, they further concluded that few parents engaged in activities such as "explicit instruction of letter names, letter-sounds correspondences, and word identification" (Baker et al., 1999). Their suggestion was to provide parents with ways to specifically help their child with these skills—not simply tell them what to do. This is an example of home interventions focusing on making the parents more "teacher-like."

Proponents of the developmental/cognitive approach focus on providing school-type activities in the homes of young children. Many programs have been put into place that work from a deficit model that frames these home environments as missing key components that will help the children develop literacy skills. These programs show positive gains in specific areas of literacy including vocabulary and decoding skills (Jordan et. al, 2000; Haney & Hill, 2004). Development/cognitive home-school connections try to model the activities of the home to match the school curriculum, overlooking the value of other home literacies.

### **Ethnographic/socio-cultural**

Researchers and educators who align themselves with the socio-cultural viewpoint see literacy as a socially constructed event which occurs within specific contexts such as communities, homes, and schools. Unlike those who espouse the development/cognitive viewpoint, their goal is not to make the home more like school, but rather, they seek to empower parents to participate in their child's literacy development. The importance of the family's existing home literacy practices are acknowledged and valued. Parents and parent educators work together to use the children's existing skills to develop new literacies that will help them be more successful in school. Socio-cultural home literacy connections focus on an additive model rather than a deficit model as seen in the developmental/cognitive approach. Emergent literacy practices which include the home as a rich literacy environment are included in this approach. The focus is on valuing all types of literacy development including, but not limited to, school-type literacies.

Barton (1994) and Rivalland (2000) recognize literacy as a variety of skill sets which are nurtured and developed in different contexts. One skill set or literacy practice is not more valuable than another. Valuing both home literacies and school-type literacies and developing connections between them is the focus of socio-cultural school-home connections (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Korat, 2005).

Korat's (2005) study of 70 kindergarteners, 34 students from LSES and 36 students from middle SES neighborhoods in Tel-Aviv, examine how socio-economic status played out in the literacy development of these students. Korat's (2005) findings showed that the LSES students lagged behind middle SES children in the non-contextual knowledge component of emergent literacy, but not in the contextual knowledge. These

findings reinforced the idea that children from LSES backgrounds are not lacking in all literacies.

Heath (1983), through her seminal ethnographic study, argues that working-class families clearly understood the importance of literacy for their children and participated in home-based language and literacy socialization. Heath points out that the families in her study often provided versions of what they thought might “count” as literacy. Many of these literacies fall in the contextual category of literacies, such as singing, storytelling, and dinner-time conversation. Carrington and Luke (2003) contend that Heath’s work made clear that “the literacy activities and oral language socialization taking place in such homes were mismatched to those of school, and therefore acted to disadvantage these children” (p. 4). Through her work, Heath argues that the activities that were unique to each community may not be the typical emergent literacy practices that produce prior knowledge for the students when they enter school for the first time, but were rich in possibilities of their own.

Webster and Feiler (1998) looked in depth at ten British children and their literacy development. The children were divided by their preschool teachers into two categories—literacy success predicted and literacy difficulties predicted. The purpose of the study was to see if the experience of literacy events at home were “visible” to teachers. Researchers observed the children at home and interviewed parents. They concluded that all of the children had been introduced to a wide variety of literacy activities including storybook reading and other school type literacies. The difference appeared to be in the quality of the activities. Webster and Feiler (1998) state that their data “points to differences in both the quantity and quality of literacy events” (p. 239) rather than the availability of experiences. They also conclude that teachers did see the students’ literacy skills. They were able to predict the skill level of the children not by their economic class

or perceived background, but by pragmatic factors such as behavior of children during pre-school visits, progress of older siblings, and the overall home attitude of the family towards school. Although a promising study, the literacies events in the home were still gauged against the literacies of the school. From a socio-cultural conception of literacies, researchers and educators must value and identify school literacies and home literacies alike and use both to create the home-school connections necessary to ensure academic success for their students. By learning more about the family's home literacy practices and making connections to school literacies, new literacies can be developed. Taylor (1998) adds, "(I)n developing educational opportunities for families, it is essential that we begin by learning about their lives so that together we can build meaningful connections between everyday learning and school learning" (p. 551). In Taylor's (1998) work, she documented how families' literacy practices involve every aspect of family life. The interaction between children and adults in everyday activities result in the literacies of the children. Taylor (1998) notes that it is difficult to extract specific literacy practices from the array of everyday experiences where the sharing of literacy is ongoing. This was found to be true in this dissertation study. The literacy practices intertwined with everyday occurrences making it difficult to look at one with out examining the other.

Home to school programs which use socio-cultural framework also show improvement in the children's literacy development. Many of these programs are part of other family literacy programs (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). The programs often focus on target groups including intergeneration groups, immigrants, cultural groups, or after school groups.

Intergenerational programs are one type of home-to-school connection. Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano, and Daly(1995) worked with an intergenerational literacy program for teenage mothers. It focused on "the collaborative process between caregivers and

children, as parents sought to transmit their newly developing skills and strengths to children in differing learning contexts” (p. 5). Their findings included that providing a wide range of activities and practices had a positive effect on literacy development. They also concluded that literacy programs need to be reconceptualized to account for a broad range of literacy contexts and practices (Neuman et al., 1995).

Moll’s (1993) work with Mexican-American families is an example of a home-school connection that worked to empower parents to make a difference in their children’s literacy development and school activities. Moll’s project worked with groups of classroom teachers to develop a greater knowledge and understanding of their students. Teachers and researchers visited the homes of students and collected information about the students, their families, and their activities. The teachers then developed learning modules based on the information that they had gathered. The results were that “the students became more active in their learning and were able to draw on their own ‘funds of knowledge’” (Moll et al., 1992, Moll, 2005; Cairney, 2002). The Funds of Knowledge Project continues to work with teachers, developing them as teacher researchers to bring meaningful experiences for students as they connect home to school (Moll, 2005). The Project supports teachers engaging in research by providing training and researchers to work with them as they go into their students’ homes.

FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educado [Learning, Improving, Educating]) is an example of a family literacy program working with Latino families in the Chicago area. The project’s approach began as developmental/cognitive and changed to social-cultural as it developed (Rodriguez-Brown, 2009). Rodriguez-Brown (2009) comments that FLAME underwent changes when she and her colleagues felt that the parents’ voices and concerns were not being valued. They moved from the program being a top down approach to a program where the participants took leadership

in the direction of the program. By allowing the parents' voices to be heard, the program became more responsive to the individual parents' need. This program has been replicated in 54 sites, and its success lies in the connections made between the parents and the schools.

### **Summary of Home School Literacy Connections**

This section reviews the literature on home-school literacy connections and the programs that strive to support these practices. There two basic understanding of home-school literacy connections: a developmental/cognitive and socio-cultural framing. The programs that emerge from these understandings of the home-school literacy connection strive to help students develop the necessary literacy skills to be successfully in school, their focuses are different. The developmental/cognitive approach tries to make home environments more school-like, while the socio-cultural approach looks to capitalize on the literacies in the homes and make connections from those literacies to more formal school literacies. In describing the FLAME project, Rodriguez-Brown (2009) notes how this project encompassed both concepts, starting with a developmental/cognitive philosophy and shifting to a more socio-cultural view. She said, "I thought the role of a home literacy program was to show parents how to teach literacy to their children at home in mainstream ways" (p. 151). However, she later found that the role of family literacy programs "is to share knowledge about literacy teaching and learning with parents that allows families to add new activities to the ways in which they already share and practice literacy at home" (p. 151). The conceptual framework for this study based on Vygotsky's social construction of knowledge and NLS views on multiple literacy practices occurring in many contexts and domains aligns more with the socio-cultural view of family literacy projects. Viewing the importance of home-school connections through the NLS lens points to the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about their

students' home lives and their individual cultures and ways of being. This is important in light of the diversity that exists in today's pre-kindergarten classrooms (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). I will next discuss the literature on how teachers can meet children's diverse needs through culturally responsive teaching.

### **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING**

The importance of providing successful learning experiences for students from diverse backgrounds is a basic concern for educators (Baynham, 2004). The diversity of pre-kindergarten classrooms has increased and is predicted to continue to grow. In Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (2010) reports that from 2001 to 2009, the percentage of Hispanic school age children increased from 41% to 48% while the percentage of white school age children decreased from 42% to 34% during the same time period. In addition, the population of ELL (English Language Learners) students grew at a 40% rate while the economically disadvantage rate was 34% (TEA, 2010). Genishi and Dyson (2009) point out that there is a “breathtaking diversity of school children” in pre-kindergartens. This “breathtaking diversity” is present among the students, but not always in the instruction these children are receiving. Genishi and Dyson view the current early childhood classroom instruction as uniform and homogenized. They refer to the conformity of classroom practices or the “one-size fits all” (Genishi and Dyson, 2009, p. 3). Teaching strategies skewed toward mainstream middle class students marginalize those students who are diverse. Genishi and Dyson (2009) proposes that early childhood classroom have spaces for the strengths and resources of children who are different—that is, children who might be:

Resistant to structured lessons

Physically but not linguistically gifted

Other than middle class or white



Able to become bilingual or multilingual over time

Boys that choose to wear skirts in the dress-up area, or girls who refuse to wear skirts ever

More interested in gerbils than letters of the alphabet

Mastering a ‘nonstandard’ dialect of English by the age of 3

Behaving more like an artist or expert player than a reader

And so on... Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 10

They go on to say that without creating welcoming, flexible spaces these children are “condemned to be invisible within the scope of an extremely narrow curricular lens” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 10). This underscores the need for teachers to be culturally responsive.

Students identified as “at-risk” are often marginalized in the classrooms. This is especially important to consider for pre-kindergarten students. Four-year-old students in Texas, in order to be eligible for pre-kindergarten, must meet one of the “at-risk” categories defined by the State. These include being English as a second or other language learner, low SES as determined by the Federal Free Lunch Program guidelines, foster children, children of active military, or homeless (TEA, 2009). These children bring to the classroom a variety of cultural, linguistic, and behavioral ways of being that differ from the mainstream.

When instruction focuses on the mainstream, the students whose ways of learning differ are not offered the opportunity to use what they know to form new skills and practices. Genishi and Dyson (2009) argue that pre-kindergarten classes must develop a “more welcoming terrain” that has space enough for children’s diverse ways of being and learning. The concept of culturally relevant pedagogy addresses one way to achieve more diverse instruction and learning. The next section will examine the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy ,specifically the concepts of connecting with families, funds

of knowledge, and third space. These concepts are similar in their intent to meet the children's individual needs, but each focuses on a different aspect of helping teachers be culturally responsive. Making connections and developing relationships with families provides opportunities for both families and teachers to learn more about each other, providing opportunities for better communication and understanding. The concept of "funds of knowledge" points to the many valuable literacies and daily practices that go on at home and can be brought to school to help make school more meaningful for all students. Discovering and understanding the unique literacies of the families will help make connections between the home and school. Providing opportunities for pre-kindergarteners to use funds of knowledge to strengthen literacies and develop new ones often needs a special place or environment to happen. Each of these concepts working together provides teachers with the necessary knowledge to create effective and meaningful learning environments at school.

### **Connections with families**

Utilizing the literacy skills and practices that students bring to class with them allows children to make connections from home to school. The research on culturally responsive teaching indicates that an effective way for educators to utilize the students' home literacy skills to create successful learning environments that creates bridges between home and school (Au, 2000; Gay, 2000; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Gay (2000) argues that teachers must have "the moral courage and the will to stay the course in efforts to make the educational enterprise more culturally responsive, even in the face of the opposition that is surely to come from somewhere" (p. 210).

This is especially true for students from LSES or other diverse backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (1997), in her work on culturally relevant teaching, points out that teachers must include parents and develop relationships with families outside of school.

Understanding the literacy practices of their students would be a step in this direction. In order to understand the students' literacy practices, teachers must develop opportunities to engage students and families in out of school activities (Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2005; Dickenson & Tabors, 2001; Rodriguez-Brown, 2010).

Working with diverse groups of students requires teachers to use strategies which are best suited to the children they teach. Ladson-Billings (1997) used the term "culturally relevant teaching" (p. 17) to refer to practices of teachers that met the needs of students. The National Reading Council (NRC) states that recent research on learning argues for "diagnostic teaching" which starts with child's knowledge and created a "learner-centered" environment promoted student learning where the students' home language and culture are valued (NRC, 2000).

Furthermore, in their study of literacy practices and schooling in Australia, Cairney and Ruge (1999) "explore[d] [the] differences in the language and literacy practice of school, families and community groups" (p. 25). Cairney and Ruge (1999) examined the matches and mismatches of the home and school literacy and how this made an impact on the students' success. Cairney and Ruge (1999) draw from Bourdieu (1977) and Gee (1990) to argue that there is strong evidence that schools are not tapping the social and cultural resources of the society and "inadvertently privileging specific groups by emphasizing particular linguistic styles, curricula, and authority patterns" (Cairney & Ruge, 1999, p. 25). Using observations of home, school, and community literacy practices; literacy artifacts; and discourse analysis, Cairney and Ruge (1999) found that there were strong matches and strong differences in the purposes of literacy activities and the types of activities between home and school. Among the study's conclusions was the need for teacher education that helped teachers acquire knowledge of "the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of families, the effect that matches and

mismatches between the literacy of home and school have on success at school, strategies for building more effective relationships between home and school, and strategies for developing more socially, culturally and linguistically responsive curricula” (Cairney & Ruge, 1999, p. 3). Knowing the students and their families would allow teachers to develop experiences that will build on existing knowledge and practices transferring these skills into other more formal practices. The knowledge developed from these home connections often points to the many and varied skills parents and children utilize in their daily work, entertainment, and cultural and social activities. This collection of skills and knowledge, or funds of knowledge, can be utilized to bridge their learning at home to learning at school.

### **Funds of knowledge**

Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez’s (1992) conceptualization of “funds of knowledge” documents one way that shared experiences between the children and their families and the teachers and classmates at school can be developed. Moll et al. (1992) looked to the homes for ways to improve teaching for a group of Mexican-American students in Arizona. Moll et al. (1992) points out that their research redefined “the homes of the students as rich in funds of knowledge that represent important resources for education change” (p. 139). Moll et al. (1992) claim that “by capitalizing on household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instructions these children commonly encounter in schools” (pg. 132). For example, incorporating songs and games from the students’ homes into the daily morning circle time allows for these skills to be shared and then drawn upon for future learning. Offering areas, such as the dramatic play center, where students can build upon their home practices and lead others in orchestrating a “trip to the grocery store” where they are using grocery shopping lists, paying with coupons, and

looking at labels to make choices provide connects from home contexts to school contexts. This allows familiar activities to form foundations to new literacies of more formal writing, reading, and organizing work.

Similarly, Riojas-Cortez (2001) examined the funds of knowledge that preschoolers displayed during socio-dramatic play in a two-way bilingual classroom. This qualitative study looked at the 12 preschoolers' language and culture and how it played out in the classroom. Through observation of the children and parental interviews, Riojas-Cortez (2001) identified several funds of knowledge that children brought with them and used in their play. These funds included emotions, values and beliefs, thoughts, customs or traditions, language, ways of discipline, and the value of education (p. 36). She concluded that using children's knowledge "as a premise, teachers can definitely not only include 'culture' but also use it as tool for learning" (p. 39). This knowledge includes language, values and beliefs, traditions, household care, and the value of education.

### **Third space**

In addition to using the "funds of knowledge" from homes in the classrooms, creating opportunities within the classroom for students and teachers to share experiences is important. Providing opportunities for this sharing of home experiences and school experiences can be achieved by creating a "third space" where students and teachers interact (Gutierrez, 2008; Cook, 2005). Moje et al. (2004) argued that there are three perspectives on "third space." One view positions third space as a way to build bridges from home to school in order to help students learn conventional academic knowledge. This is important because it provides opportunities for success in mainstream learning while offering a space for the marginalized voices (Moje et al., 2004; Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1983). The second view of third space is one of developing navigation skills

through their own particular current knowledge that can be used to cross over into other disciplines. For example, teaching students using their own knowledge about how to interact with a story can then create navigations skills to help them tackle a selection in their science book (Luke, 2001; Moje et al., 1992; Hammond, 2001, Wong, 1996). The third addresses cultural, social, and epistemological change taking place in third spaces. In these types of third spaces, both teachers and students bring their own ideas to the conversation. This sharing of ideas leads to critical thinking which challenges both parties practices and may result in the creation of a new way of thinking or both (Hammond, 2001; Seiler, 2001; Moje et al., 2001; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Moje et al., 2004).

Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Carrillo, and Collanzo (2004) utilized all three views on third space in their study with 30 middle school students in a predominantly Latino/a urban community (p. 41). For example, Alicia and Brenda spoke about mescal farms and the effects that the soil, water, and thieves had on their family business. Participating in third space activities were able to take their current knowledge and, through the group interaction, build bridges to understanding the science concepts of environmental pollution (Moje, et al., 2004). Moje et al. identify third space as a method of providing a bridge between marginalized and conventional knowledge and discourses and providing spaces that enable students to bring “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992) from home to bear on school learning.

Cook (2005) looked at creating opportunities to make “experiences of family and community life visible to school, just as schools make their curriculum real to families” p. 85). She encouraged development of a third space in classrooms where students can share their home experiences and use them to develop and learn new skills. She uses Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to explain how learning can be

scaffolded from what the children know from home and what they need to learn at school. Meira (2001) also sees third space as an example of Vygotsky's ZPD where participants teach each other and learn from each other. One example provided by Cook (2005) was that of Pedro and his planting of seeds. Several episodes revolved around discussions, viewing the older students' gardens, experimenting, and observing his plant. Teachers were able to take his home experiences of planting and the experiences of the garden at school to scaffold his knowledge into more formal information about plants and growing cycle. Space, opportunity, and scaffolding were all part of helping Pedro to develop new formal learning from his existing experiences. Creating spaces for young children to use what they know to make connections and learn new skills will make learning more accessible.

### **Summary of Culturally Responsive Literature**

The diversity of pre-kindergartners creates a need for teachers to be culturally responsive so that each child can successfully participate in learning experiences at school. By connecting with families and developing relationships, teachers can develop ways in which these literacies can be built upon to enhance the children's existing literacies and develop new ones. Understanding and utilizing the funds of knowledge in the homes of their students offers teachers opportunities to bring home to school. This can be accomplished through various methods, including projects as Moll et al. (1992) discussed or bringing these events or activities to school. Examining the concept of "third space" offers teachers additional ways to provide opportunities for students to develop and expand on their existing literacies. Developing places where children are comfortable playing and interacting with others offers opportunities for scaffolding of new skills and the strengthening of existing literacies. Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding learning through social interactions can be utilized in these "third spaces" created in the

classrooms. Much of the work on culturally responsive teaching has concentrated on older children. For example, Moll et al. (1992) worked with elementary age students as did Moje et al. (2004), Gutierrez (2008), and Meira (2001). My study examined the development of culturally responsive teaching in pre-kindergarten by focusing on making connections with families and learning about the family's home literacy practices. These practices served as funds of knowledge that could be used at school to provide meaningful activities that built on their existing practices. I also examined the concept of third space in the pre-kindergarten classroom and ways that the pre-kindergarten teachers created spaces which enabled students and teachers to use their own unique literacies to connect to other literacies provides implications for improving teachers' practices.

The importance of being culturally responsive is illuminated by the importance that is being placed on achieving specific literacy skills by third grade. The focus on accountability requires teachers to provide the best learning experiences for all of their students in order for them to be successful in this environment. I now turn to the literature on current policies including state and federal mandates and their impact on the teaching of early literacy practices.

## **POLICIES AND TRENDS**

Teachers are working in an environment that is being impacted by a series of reforms that strive to improve the academic achievement of all students. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and state-mandated, standards-based accountability reforms emphasize the importance of all students being successful on their "grade level" testing. Although the first accountability testing occurs in third grade, the impact is felt by what Hatch (2002) calls the "shove down" effect. The importance of pre-kindergarten students' academic success is visible through the policies that are emerging across the United States (Stipek, 2006; Wat, 2008). Stipek (2006) notes that



policymakers believe by promoting academic skill development in young children from low-income families, the achievement gap between them and their middle-class peers will be decreased. This demand for high academic achievement by all has provided the fuel for many organizations and policymakers to develop initiatives to ensure that pre-kindergartens are a part of the public education system. Among these policies are the Bush administrations' Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative (GSGS) and the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 (H.R.).

One of the major impacts of GSGS and the Head Start Reauthorization Act are mandates for early childhood programs, including pre-kindergarten programs, to develop standards that align with the K-12 academic standards. Emphasis has been placed on developing specific standards that all pre-kindergarten children must meet to be considered academically successful in language, literacy, and math (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Similar mandates to create academic standards for pre-kindergarten are being made by the state agencies. For example, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) recently adopted new pre-kindergarten guidelines that address concept development in ten domains with three of the domains focusing specifically on early literacy skills (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

This push to develop standards and accountability measures in pre-kindergarten concerns many early childhood educators. Neuman & Roskos (2005) commented that among the early childhood community there is a "cautious enthusiasm" (p. 126). Clearly articulated standards can provide direction and uniformity to pre-kindergarten classrooms; however, it is also feared that if the standards are narrow in their definition of literacy, they can lead teachers away from instruction that is responsive to individual need and interest of children (Stipek, 2006. Teale et al., 2010). The concern that teachers will turn away from being centered on the whole child (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and

emphasize only academic skills is being articulated by early childhood educators (Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Teale et al., 2010). Hatch (2002) notes this concern by saying that he sees “the proliferation of standards for early childhood settings as ‘accountability shove down’ that threatens the integrity of early childhood professionals and the quality of educational experiences for young children” (p. 461). This concern can be seen in the direction that is being taken in the development of policy and standards by both federal and state policymakers in the area of literacy.

According to Stipek (2006), literacy experts are concerned that the standards are focusing on school-type literacies such as decoding skills and are not including the other more informal skills that are just as valuable. Newman & Roskos (2005) point out children’s language skills that are conceptual and culturally learned are just as important as decoding to reading success. For example, a student’s ability to participate in long conversations with his mother and accurately relay that information to his sister is a display of comprehension skills which are as important to reading as decoding skills. The strong focus on school-type literacies in the standards helps to drive teachers’ instruction away from the literacies children bring from home to the formal school literacies.

Another concern among current trends and policies is the assessment of children in pre-kindergarten. Stipek (2006) noted that in her experience with NCLB, the test or assessment instrument has a strong impact on what and how the standards or skills are taught. Head Start teachers, after giving their students the national Reporting System assessment, commented that they changed the focus of their instruction and concentrated on isolated skills (Government Accountability Office, 2005). Teaching good social skills is important in the field of early education to promote competencies that help students be successful in school are not overlooked. Similarly, TEA and the Children’s Learning

Institute (CLI) in Houston have developed a certification program, Texas School Ready! (TSR), to certify both public and private pre-kindergartens as quality educational experiences. A TSR pre-kindergarten is one that focuses on having all the students ready for kindergarten. For example, the success of a TSR pre-kindergarten is indicated by the students' subsequent TPRI (Texas Primary Reading Inventory) the following year. This is a two year process that looks at the students' formal development of skills as qualifiers.

Many early childhood educators fear that by teaching to the standards, teaching will become fragmented (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Stipek (2006) warns educators and policymakers that if we do not carefully look at the assessment of the standards as well as the standards themselves, we may not succeed in the academic area or in the other areas such as social skills that are important in early childhood education.

### **Summary of Policies and Trends**

In reviewing the literature on the policies and trends in early childhood education, a change is detected in what is happening in the pre-kindergarten classrooms. Brown (2009) stated that policy changes are altering the landscape of our early childhood classes. Specifically, as noted above, policymakers' demands for standards and formalized assessments are leading pre-kindergarten teachers to focus on preparing their students for future academic success and not concentrating on meeting the students' varied, individual needs. This focus substantially impacts how literacy instruction is seen in pre-kindergarten classrooms. The emphasis on academic, school-type literacies is valued and pushes them above other literacies that students bring with them to school.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this literature review, I have examined the history of the views on young children's literacy development, home-school connection and intervention programs in

emergent literacy, the ways in which teachers create culturally relevant environments to foster learning, and the policies and trends that impact emergent literacy in the pre-kindergarten classrooms. This review revealed several gaps in the literature that need to be addressed, such as limited research with public pre-kindergarten students from LSES families, specific information on what types of home literacies exist in homes of LSES pre-kindergarten students, the impact of the new pre-kindergarten standards on the valuing of home literacies, and how pre-kindergarten teachers understand and utilize literacies that are not school-type literacies. Thus, this dissertation study examined the literacy practices of a sample of pre-kindergarten students from LSES families in their homes and community environments with the hope of providing information that will help fill many of these gaps in the literature. In the next section of this proposal, I discuss the conceptual framework that I used to address the questions that guided my study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

In this study, I use a very broad definition of literacy that includes all multiple literacy practices that children, teachers, and parents use daily to interact with the world around them rather than a set of skills. Pahl and Roswell (2009) recognize literacy as “a social practice, something that people do in everyday life, in their homes, at work and at school (p. 11). These literacy practices are socially constructed as children interact with other children and adults while going about their daily lives. The ways that children communicate, understand what is going on around them, and use symbols for representation are all parts of the children’s literacy practice. This conception of literacy is rooted in two theoretical perspectives—Vygotsky’s socio-cultural constructivist

learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), and the New Literacy Studies (NLS) socio-cultural perspective on literacy (Street, 2003; Barton, 1994, Gee, 2004).

In trying to understand how young children develop literacy skills, the importance of social interactions between them and their family in their home and between them and their classmates and teachers became evident. By using Vygotsky's social-cultural learning theory, I examined the literacy practices in homes by focusing on these interactions between the child and others. NLS constructs added to my framework by providing the conceptual tools I needed to analyze these literacy events. Relevant parts of each of these frameworks combined together to form the conceptual basis for my study. Below, I review each of these perspectives and relate them to the study.

## **VYGOTSKY**

Because I view literacy as socially constructed, several of Vygotsky's learning theory concepts form an important part of my conceptual framework. Examining literacy through Vygotsky's theory of social construction provides insights into how young children develop language. The concepts of social construction of learning and the zone of proximal development provide (ZDP) helped me understand the literacy events and practices I observed in the homes. These concepts provided a framework for me to analyze the interactions I observed between the pre-kindergartner and others as I studied their home literacies.

### **Social interaction**

Vygotsky (1978) stated that learning does not take place in isolation, but in social interaction informed by day-to-day understandings. Children acquire knowledge through their culture. Furthermore, he stated that "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then within the child (intra-

psychological)” (p. 57). Learning is socially constructed through social interaction. This social interaction between the pre-kindergartner and others was apparent in home, community, and school settings where literacy events and practices take place. Dickinson and Smith (1994) acknowledged the importance of the social interaction to construct new literacy skills in their study, stating that “consistent with Vygotskian view of development, literacy skills...are acquired through social interactions” (p. 106). Therefore, in studying the home literacy practices of the pre-kindergartners, I was able to see the interactions that took place between the children and their families and watch as they developed into new practices. This also has meaning for teachers in that by creating opportunities for social interactions between their students, the pre-kindergartners can strengthen their literacies from home and build upon them to develop new literacy practice.

## **ZPD**

The second concept from Vygotsky’s work that I incorporate into my conception of literacy development is scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Children develop literacy through interaction with peers, family members, and other adults. In defining ZPD, Wertsch (1991) quotes Vygotsky as saying, “This zone is defined as the distance between a child's "actual development level as determined by independent problem solving" and the higher level of "potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, Vygotsky's italics). Simply, ZPD is the difference between the two levels of learning--the actual and potential levels. The actual (independent) level includes activities the child can accomplish alone and the potential level includes learning more challenging concepts while being guided by an adult, capable peer, or other informational sources. The term scaffold or scaffolding, although

not in Vygotsky's (1978) original work, is often used when describing the activity that occurs in the ZPD. Therefore, scaffolding can be described as the support given to learners when they are engaged in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This scaffolding is usually provided by other more knowledgeable adults or children who enter into a learning exchange with the child (Ko, Schallert, & Walters, 2003). Also, Salomon and Perkins (1998) include objects such as books, videos, DVDs, instruction manuals, recordings, and other tools as providing scaffolding for learning. They state that "the learner may enter into some kind of intellectual partnership or at least be greatly helped by cultural artifacts in the form of tools and information sources" (p. 5). Haney and Hill (2004) point out that the ZPD can be used to target the point at which a caregiver, teacher, or parent can begin to strengthen literacy skills. The development of literacy practices and events occur in the ZPD where more knowledgeable others provide scaffolding. Understanding the literacies that students bring with them to the classroom provides opportunities for teachers to successfully scaffold new learning in the ZPD (Au & Rapahel, 2000).

Thus, in my study, Vygotsky's concept of social interaction is central to my work because of the impact of social construction on the development of literacy practices. Literacy practices change as the context changes and as the interactions between the child and others continues to occur. Vygotsky's theory of social interaction helps explain these changes. Moreover, his idea of ZPD allows me to focus on the interactions between the child and their "more knowledgeable others" in my analysis of my data as well as giving me insights into the teachers' views on how children develop literacy. Using the Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding, the literacy practices of the children can be examined as possible bridges to help children navigate the school environment. Combined, these two constructs from Vygotsky's work provide the foundation for my conceptualization of

literacy practices I used in my study. To this foundation, I add the theories from the New Literacy Studies, which I will now discuss.

### **NEW LITERACY STUDIES**

Vygotsky's theories assert that language and literacy are socially constructed. Learners first learn socially with others and then move to developing their own personal understanding. This insight into the literacy process offers me a foundation to comprehend how literacy practices are developed and expanded as new information or interactions occur. However, it is not enough to help me fully appreciate literacy as an ever changing socially constructed practice. Since I view literacy as being specific for a particular event or place and a particular purpose, I incorporate the work of the New Literacy Studies to focus on the multiple and situated literacy practices that takes place among varied social and cultural contexts. As noted previously in the literature review, Gee (2000) refers to literacy as a social process that occurs in contexts such as families and communities. NLS researchers focus more on the interaction, contexts, and experiences of the students than their individual literacy skills. This is a change from the previous concept of literacy as being skills based. Focusing on the students' interactions and experiences in the home context allows for the valuing of all the many experiences and literacy practices that they bring with them to pre-kindergarten. Teachers then can use these home literacy practices to scaffold new literacies at school. Although much research has been done on the skill driven concept of literacy learning with young children, little has been done on the more socially constructed home literacies of pre-kindergarten students.



The concepts that are detailed by researchers in the area of New Literacy Studies (NLS) provide a framework for the understanding of the socio-cultural development of literacy. Gee (1991) and Street (2003) explain NLS as having a focus of considering literacy as a social practice rather than an acquisition of skills. Street (2003) points out that literacy looks at the different cultural practices in varying domains or contexts. The important concepts taken from the NLS perspective that have helped me develop the framework for this study are the ideas of multiple literacies, literacy practices and events, and domains. Each researcher has a different definition of these important elements of literacy, which are examined below and summarized in chart form.

### **Multiple literacies**

NLS argues that there is not one single literacy, but multiple literacies (Barton, 1994; Heath, 1982; Street 2003). Street (2003) points out that NLS represents a new “tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice” (p. 1). NLS researchers use various ways of identifying and describing literacy practices. They look at domains, cultures, functions, values, interactions and others elements to examine multiple literacies (Hull & Schultz, 2002). For example, Hull and Schultz (2002) use the NLS perspective as they look at out of school literacies and in school literacies, Street (2003) imposes the distinctions of local and distant literacies and Gee (2004) uses the terms world language and academic language. These terms developed by the NLS theorists are used to illustrate that literacy differs depending on context and needs to be viewed not simply as a set of skills, but as multiple literacies that are situated within social and cultural practices and discourses (Hull & Schultz, 2002). These terms attempt to make clear that traditional literacies are a part of the overall

literacy practices, but not the only part. In using these terms, the NLS theorist have set up categories to view literacies, putting emphasis on the literacies' context, purpose, and ways they are learned. For example, Street's use of local and distant literacies focuses on how and where these literacies are developed and used. In his field work in Iran, he discussed the local literacies that take place in the homes and communities and the global literacies that are used in the religious and school setting. In his findings the "maktab" local literacies were often hidden while the global literacies were visible. (Hull & Schultz, (2002). In this study, I used the terms "school-type literacies" and "home literacies" to define the context where the literacy developed and gained its original purpose. This terminology relates specifically to my research questions and does not position the children's literacies in one domain or the other.

In using this kind of dichotomy to understand multiple literacies, several concerns have emerged. Street (2003) points out that researchers such as Brandt and Clinton (2002) were concerned about over "romanticizing" the local literacies and not valuing the autonomous (global) literacies (Street, 2003, pg. 3). They warned against looking at literacy as a dichotomy that "relegates all good things to out-of-school contexts and everything repressive to school." Hull and Schultz addressed these concerns by arguing that rather than using the dichotomy to value one side of the dichotomy over the other, "we might do well to look for overlap or complementarily or perhaps a respectful division of labor" (p. 3). Although the categories and vocabulary created by the NLS to develop the concept of more than one kind of literacy were helpful to the beginning stages of understanding home literacies, they were used in this study only as a tool to begin to see literacies other than just the school-type literacies that are skill oriented. In this study, multiple literacies were identified in all domains, including school, home, and community. Focus was given to the literacy events and practices in all domains.

## **Literacy events, practices, and domains**

In NLS, constructs of literacy include literacy events, literacy practices, and domains which help describe the literacy practices that take place in daily life. These elements of NLS theory provide a system for looking at the activities in the homes of the pre-kindergarten students. By focusing on the specific literacy event that is observable and identifying the domain where it is taking place, the actual literacy practices can be better understood. I will now discuss each of these terms.

### ***The literacy event***

The event is the basic unit to be analyzed. The term “literacy event” is derived from the sociolinguistic idea of speech events (Street, 2003). Barton’s definition of a literacy event is any interaction with a written text. Heath (1983) referred to literacy events as being “when talk revolves around a piece of writing” and also as situations “where literacy has an integral role” (1983, p. 71). Heath (1982) also pointed out that often oral literacy events are connected to previous written texts and, therefore, are labeled oral texts. For example, jump rope rhymes, retelling of stories, and singing songs are examples literacy events that include oral texts. For this study, literacy events will be any interaction either oral or written “where literacy has a role” (Barton, 1994, p. 37).

### ***Literacy practices***

Barton (1994) states that “[L]iteracy is a social activity and can best be described in terms of people’s literacy practices which they draw upon in literacy events” (p.34). Therefore, literacy practices refer to the common patterns that are used in particular situations. Howell (2007) points out that Street (1995) uses the concept of literacy practices to “denote what people do with literacy and the particular nature of literacy in specific times and places” (p. 7). Street (2003) adds that literacy practices are the “broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and

writing in cultural contexts” (p. 2). Barton defines literacy practices as “the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy which people draw upon in a literacy event” (Barton, 1994, p. 37). As such, literacy practices can provide the cultural and personal view into the literacy skills of children. For this study, literacy practices are defined as how children respond and interact with literacy events based on their culture, experience, purposes, and the domains where they occur.

### ***Literacy domains***

Barton (1994) introduced the concept of domains. NLS scholars look at literacy domains as places where literacy events occur. Barton (1994) notes that “[P]eople have different literacies which they make use of, associate with different domains of life.” Heath (1983) showed the importance of these different literacies or practices through her descriptions of the children engaging in learning language in different domains. Using Barton’s (1994) terms, one can help position literacy firmly in the social and cultural context. For example, the reading of newspaper clipping in Trackton is an example of the patterns and ways that that community participated to share understanding and make meaning out of the information during a literacy event (Heath, 1983).

Literacy events and practices are unique not only because of the patterns formed, but also because of the domain in which it happens. The main domain in Heath’s writings is the home setting. Barton (1994) agrees that “the home is the centre from which individuals venture out into other domains” (p. 39). They also note that this transition of literacy practices from one domain to other domains is difficult. This is especially true with children entering school settings for the first time. Investigating and illuminating these different practices and the way they play out in different domains is crucial to the helping pre-kindergarten teachers guide their practice to be responsive to the multiple literacy practices of their students.

During the observations of the pre-kindergarten students, I used the above construct from NLS to help me dissect the literacy events and practices in the domains that I observed. I examined events for not only what was happening, but the patterns of literacy practices that they created or utilized. I also noted the domains in which they occurred, the interactions of others during the event, and how this event reappeared in different contexts.

### **Summary of Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study uses a socio-cultural lens to view the pre-kindergartners home literacies and their teachers' literacy practices. This lens was developed by looking closely at Vygotsky's socio-cultural constructivist learning theory to examine how children learn language and literacy. A socially constructed perspective recognizes that teaching does not occur in isolation, but instead is socially situated and constructed, with and among people. Vygotsky's socially constructed theory of learning is seen in the work on NLS theorists such as Gee (1996); Street (1993), and Barton. The NLS argues that there are multiple literacies that occur in specific places and for specific purposes that learning is socially constructed. In examining literacies, NLS argue the importance of understanding the event itself, the domain where it occurs, and the practices that are used to participate in the event. The literacy event is the actual activity that is happening. The domain is where this event takes place. Literacies can change according to the domain in which they occur. The literacy practice itself is the patterns and ways that the child uses to participate in the event and make meaning from it. Vygotsky's theory of socially constructed learning and scaffolding help see the patterns and methods in the literacy practices. Therefore, Vygotsky and NLS provided a framework for me to examine the literacy practices that in the homes of the pre-

kindergarten students. They also provided the overall construct of literacy that I used in examining the teachers views on literacies and their reactions to the literacy stories. .

## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The literature review and theoretical framework described in the above provided the foundation for this study. Noting the pressures that are being placed on pre-kindergarten children and teachers to succeed on high-stakes learning environments emphasizes the importance that should be placed on providing the most meaningful experiences for children. The pre-kindergarten students in Seam ECC are all identified as at-risk students. As Au & Raphael (2000) note, when success in school is being measured by academic accomplishment, the of privileging academic skills over other literacy skills can occur. This privileging of school-type skills adversely affects students from homes of diverse literacy backgrounds including those students from LSES households (Au & Raphael, 2000) and underscores the need to identify the pre-kindergarten students' literacies in order to use these literacies as foundations for new learning (Haney & Hill, 2004). In identifying these literacies and examining the literacy practices of the teachers, a socio-constructed framework will be used to understand the different contexts more fully. Pahl & Roswell (2006) note that examining literacy can be most effective by looking closely at language domains and events. This study examined closely the literacy practices and events in the collection of pre-k students' homes and community domains in order to develop a fuller understanding of their literacies.

In the next section, I will explain the research methodology used in this study. I will review my directed research project and how those findings led me to look at a broader definition of literacy in the homes of the pre-kindergarten students in my setting and describe the participants and the methods of data analysis.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The primary purpose of my study was to identify and examine the home literacy practices of six pre-kindergarten students and their teachers' literacy views and practices. The information gained from this study adds to the current literature on pre-kindergarten literacy development by providing varied examples of home literacies and how they are included in families' everyday life. By studying the literacy practices of these teachers and their responses to their students' "literacy stories," much can be learned about the impact home literacies can and do have in pre-kindergarten classrooms. Early childhood educators can utilize this information as they work to provide opportunities for students to use their existing literacy practices as they develop new literacy skills. The questions that guided this proposed study are:

1. What literacy events and practices take place in the homes and immediate communities of a sample of low SES pre-kindergarten children in a rural Texas school district?
2. What is the focus of the teachers' literacy instruction and the underlying constructs including their views on home and school type literacies?
3. How do teachers' see their practices being impacted by the identification of particular home literacies of their students through the literacy stories?

In the following subsections, I describe how my directed research study provided the impetus for the development of the research questions. Then, I detail the design of my study.

#### **DIRECTED RESEARCH**

In the fall of 2006, I conducted a directed research study entitled: Emergent Literacy Practices of Even Start Parents. I used a qualitative case study approach to look at the attitudes and practices of a group of mothers of pre-school children enrolled in an

Even Start program in a small, rural town in central Texas. I chose the Even Start program because of the ease of access to the program through my previous interactions with the group and their interest in emergent literacy. The questions that guided the project were:

What are the parents' attitudes towards storybook reading with their children?

What other types of literacy practices occur within the family?

As seen in the above questions, this study focused on school-type literacies and how families supported them. However, once I began organizing the data, I discovered that although much of the data fell into themes around these school-type literacies, much did not. The data that did not "fit" became more intriguing than the data that did fit. A new category of informal activities or home-type literacy activities developed through my analysis of this data. In my studies as a doctoral student, I turned to the literature and course work to help me develop new perspectives and constructs on literacy development and its socio-cultural construction.

My studies took me in several directions that included literature on New Literacy Studies, funds of knowledge, and third space. First, my readings led me to examine the concept of New Literacy Studies (NLS) and the importance of valuing and understanding the home literacies of all students (Street 2002; Gee, 2004). Gee (2004) introduced the idea of life language and academic language. Academic language is what is necessary to be successful in school and differs from the language that is used to talk about life. This concept of two different types of languages can also be applied to two different kinds of literacy that the mothers shared in their interviews. The mothers related their efforts of including school-type activities in their daily lives. Maria, a mother in the study, emphasized this when she said, "I start reading to Kevin when he was six months, that is when we start (sic) Even Start." (field notes, 2007). According to the mothers, there was



a strong one-way transfer of school-literacies to home, but it was not apparent that there was any “traffic from home to school” of literacy activities (Marsh, 2003).

The mothers more easily spoke to me about informal literacy activities such as singing, storytelling, and conversations, and they seemed more eager to share these experiences with me (field notes, 5/09/07). For example, Gina said she mainly sang songs in Spanish except for school songs like the ABCs. When asked if her daughter sang these at school, she indicated that they were for home, not school. It concerned me that Gina did not feel that these literacy events were of value at school. It also made me question what other literacy events were occurring in the home that I had not identified in my research.

The interviews and observations from this directed study illuminated for me the idea that something was missing in my investigation of emerging literacy skills. I felt that I was missing an important part of understanding early literacy. I began to see that I was framing literacy from a school model and focusing on what was not happening instead of what was happening. I needed to look at the children’s literacies not from a deficit view, but seeing them as assets to their development. I began to see that I needed to expand my definition of literacy to include these multiple literacies that I had found in the homes. From these observations, I developed the research questions that I have outlined for this study. Currently, the studies on identifying home literacies and examining the use of these literacies by teachers in their practice focus on the elementary years. My study added to the literature by specifically looking at pre-kindergarten students from LSES homes.

## **DESIGN**

Qualitative methods were used to address my research questions. Specifically, I employed case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) to examine the literacy

practices and events of six pre-kindergarten students and their teachers' literacy practices. I wanted to see how their literacies were developed and fostered at home, and how these same literacies were viewed by their pre-k teachers. I chose this qualitative method of investigation because this design is well suited to study situations "where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1994, p. 13). The literacy practices of young children are intertwined within the contexts of their daily lives. Therefore, separating the issue of literacy practices from the contexts they interact with on a daily basis would not be possible. Using Stake's (1995) principle of choosing the case in order to "maximize what we can learn" (p. 4), I chose the students and the teachers from the school district where I worked because of my access to the program and the interest that teachers and parents in this program showed in literacy and literacy development. Public school pre-kindergarten is not a well-researched program area of early childhood, and as more emphasis is being placed on pre-kindergarten by policymakers, the importance of learning about what is happening in pre-kindergartens and with pre-kindergarten students is growing. Considering the push by NCLB to read by third grade, it is necessary to develop a better understand of pre-kindergarten students' literacy practices.

## **SETTING**

The setting for each of the case studies was the homes and community of six pre-kindergarten children who attend Seam Early Childhood Center (Seam ECC). Seam is a rural town in Central Texas with a population of approximately 17,000 located at the crossroads of two state highways. (To maintain confidentiality, all names are pseudonyms, and all numbers and percentages are approximations.) Although it is surrounded by cotton and cornfields, it is approximately 35 miles from a major urban city. Many of the residents commute to the city to work, while others work in local jobs,

farming, and the retail and service industry jobs. The two largest employers in the community are the school district and a large utility regulator. The community has three light manufacturing businesses, one large grocery store (H.E.B.), a Wal-Mart., a McDonalds, and several churches. Fishing, hunting, and baseball are the main pastimes for residents (Economic Development Corporation, 2010).

The Seam Independent School District's (SISD) student population was 3,100 in 2008 (TEA, 2008). According to the State's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS, 2007-8), 60% of the school population qualify for free or reduced lunch (70% at the Early Childhood Campus). The school district's demographics as indicated by the 2008 AEIS was 30% White, 55% Hispanic, 14% African American, 0.5% Native American, and 0.5% Asian/Pacific Islander (TEA, 2008). The school district is organized in a stacked grade-level design. Each campus serves all of the children in a particular grade-level for the entire school district (e.g. the ECC houses pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and preschool children with disabilities [PPCD] program). Seam ISD has a collaborative agreement with Head Start to provide teachers to the center, which is located about one mile from the main ECC campus. The enrollment of ECC the year of this study was approximately 400 students ages three to five years.

#### **PARTICIPANT SELECTION PROCESS**

After the approval of the IRB in the summer of 2009, I began the selection process of the study's participants (see Appendix for IRB). Teachers were selected during their in-service training. This had to be done early in the school year because of TEA guidelines of the identification of formal supervisors during the first few days of school. Since I was not going to be the supervisor of the teachers participating in my study, the teachers needed to be chosen so assignments of supervisors could be made

accordingly. Students and their families were selected during the first month of school. The selection process I used is explained for each group.

### **Teachers**

This study was explained to each of the pre-kindergarten teachers, who were assured that the study was separate from their teaching at the ECC and that participating or not participating in the study would not affect their professional career. Ms. C and Ms. M volunteered to be part of the study. Since I serve as the campus administrator of the ECC, I was aware that there might be some bias that could arise. I took several actions to try to eliminate this bias. First, I did not act as the formal evaluator for these teachers. The other formal evaluator for the campus was assigned to these teachers. The leadership style I employ on the campus is one of teacher-leader. I wanted the teachers to see me in this role rather than as an administrator. I worked closely with them in their classrooms and in planning. They have expressed a continued interest in my research and have often expressed a desire to be included in research. I continually reminded the teachers that this was voluntary and had no impact on their career at Seam Early Childhood Campus. Furthermore, I refrained from participating in formal staff development sessions on early literacy or any of the School Ready Collaborative grant (SRC) staff development sessions so my theoretical perspective of social constructed literacy would not be as visible to the teachers and possibly create bias.

### **Students and their families**

The pre-kindergarten students and their families were selected in a two step process. During the first annual back to school parent-teacher meeting the proposed study was explained to Ms. C's and Ms.'s parents. After the explanation, parents who were interested in participating in the study were asked to sign up on a list. The parents on this list were then invited to attend one of the two scheduled meetings in the library to

discuss the study further. Two parents who had not attended the first meeting were invited by the teachers to participate in one of the second meetings.

To develop a friendly, family-oriented environment for the meetings, several activity stations were available for students to play while the parents listened to the presentation. Refreshments were served, details of the study were shared, and the possible implications outlined in the IRB were explained. After the discussion, parents who were still interested in participating filled out the necessary permission forms (see Appendix A for IRB letter of consent). Permission was obtained for the focus student and their siblings, as well as the parents. Five families agreed to be in the study, and an additional family joined at the suggestion of Ms. M. Permission from that family was obtained at a one-on-one meeting.

## **PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS**

### **Teachers**

Ms. M and Ms. C were two teachers who agreed to participate in this study. Ms. C, a married Hispanic woman in her mid-twenties, is a fourth-year teacher who has worked in Seam her entire career. Her first year of teaching, she was the ISD collaborative teacher at Head Start during the first half of the day and a pre-kindergarten teacher at the Seam ECC campus working with all the classes the last half of the day. The following year she was moved to the main campus for the entire day, where she taught the pre-kindergarten inclusion classroom, which serves four students with disabilities in a regular classroom setting. The other students were typically developing four-year-olds. Ms. C has two classroom paraprofessionals, one assigned to assist the children with special needs and the other assigned to the entire class. Ms. C is certified in English as a Second Language, Special Education, and Early Childhood generalist by the

State of Texas. She received her professional training in an alternative certification program. (More detailed information about the teachers can be found in chapter 5.)

Ms. M, a single, white female in her early twenties, is a second year classroom teacher who began her career at Seam ECC during the 2009 school year. She is certified as an Early Childhood Generalist and received her training at a state university in Texas in a traditional teacher education program. (See table 1.)

Table 1: Teacher qualifications and experience				
	Certifications	Pathway to Certifications	Years Teaching	Ethnicity
Ms. C	Early Childhood Generalist, ESL, SPED	Alternative certification	4 years BS in Human Development and Family Sciences Second year Master's student	Hispanic
Ms. M	EC Generalist	Traditional University	2 years BS in Applied Science	White

### Student Demographics

Six pre-kindergarten students served as the focal students of this study. These children were Sonia, Marcos, and Jeffrey from Ms. C's classroom. Robin, Lily, and Israel are students in Ms. M's classroom. Table 2 shows the demographic information about the students' qualifications. This information was self-reported by the parents during their interviews or member-checking discussion.

Table 2: Pre-kindergarten demographic as of September 1, 2010						
	Teacher	Gender	Age	Family Members	Ethnicity	Pre-K qualification criteria
Sonia	Ms. C	Female	4	M F B S	Filipino	Economic
Marcos	Ms. C	Male	4	M F	Hispanic	Economic
Jeffrey	Ms. C	Male	4	M SF SB S F SB SS	White	By ARD
Robin	Ms. M	Female	4	M F B S	White	Economic
Israel	Ms. M	Female	4	M F B	Hispanic	Economic
Lily	Ms. M	Female	4	M S	Black	Economic
<b>Table 2 Student Demographics M = mother, F-father, SF – step-father, S – sister, B – Brother, SB – step-brother,</b>						

## DATA SOURCES

Multiple data sources were used in this case study to strengthen its credibility (Yin, 2003). These sources included observations, interviews, and other related documents and artifacts such as AEIS indicators, school schedules, and school policies. These data tools are most frequently used in other literacy studies of home and school literacies and were chosen because of their fit to extracting the data relevant to this study.

## Data collection

The families participated in four observations during home and community activities, and one semi structured interview. Teachers participated in two separate interviews—one before the reading of their students' literacy stories and one after. The second interview was divided into segments. The parents and teachers selected the times and places where the observations and interviews occurred. These were rescheduled

when necessary due to illnesses, busy schedules, and emergencies. The data were collected from October to May. I had anticipated that the data collection would take only three months; however, data collection took longer because of the rescheduled observations and interviews. When observations or interviews with the families were rescheduled, it then took longer to create the literacy stories to share with the teachers, resulting in the second teacher interview being held much later than originally anticipated. Also, because of the rescheduling, the actual time frame ran into the Christmas break, further prolonging data collection further. At first, it seemed to be a detriment to my study, but later I realized that it gave me the opportunity to see more varied literacies because of the longer time frame.

### **Observations**

The parents were given the option of the observations taking place in their homes or other community places. Robin's mother invited me to attend a Saturday morning church activity. Jeffrey's mother invited me to accompany them on a trip to Wal-Mart. McDonald's was the community place chosen by Sonia, Israel, and Marcos. I attended a school picnic with Lily and her family. The variety of settings added depth to the data because of the multiple contexts for varied literacy practices to take place meshing with the NLS framework for literacy practices (Street, 2003; Gee, 2004).

The modified participant observer method was used for collecting the data (Eloy & Anzol, 1991) during the visits. On the first visit to the homes, the students and I participated in an open literacy activity. I took a large bag full of items, including magazines, junk mail, playing cards, books, markers, spiral notebooks, and small toys for the students to enjoy. The purpose of this initial visit was to help the family be more at ease with me and the observations. During conversations at the first visit, I stressed that on subsequent visits I would sit back out of the way and observe. I also stressed that I



was only observing the activities that the student participated in during the time I was there. I also said that I would probably bring my computer to work on since that was what the children were used to seeing me do when I visited their classrooms. Since the students were used to not focusing on me during my classroom visits, I felt by following my typical pattern, my presence would have less impact on their normal routines and activities. I observed and noted the activities that took place naturally in the home setting. Although trying to limit my role to a participant observer, I did interact with the students and families when I was invited into the activity or asked to help in a particular situation. An example of this was at Robin's house when she wanted me to have a tea party with her or when Jeffrey asked me to hand him things at Wal-Mart.

During these visits, I took notes when it was not distracting to the students or their families. I also wrote notes immediately after leaving the visit. I made analytical notes about the visits including ideas that needed to be addressed (Hatch, 2002). This technique helped me because it helped shaped "the direction of future data collection based on what [I am] actually finding or not finding" (Hatch, 2002, p. 149).

During the community activities, I also was a participant observer, but only when engaged by the family or child. For example, I ate at McDonald's with the family and observed the children ordering, eating, and playing afterwards. At Wal-Mart, I walked alongside the cart and engaged in conversation with the parents and Jeffrey when I was included. I took field notes and wrote analytical notes after each observation.

## **Interviews**

The interviews with the parents and the teachers were semi-structured. Hancock & Algozzine (2006) argue that "(s)emi-structured interviews are particularly well-suited for case study research" (p. 40). Interviews with the teachers and families were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Some guiding questions were developed from a

questionnaire used in previous studies, including Webster and Feiler (1998), Howell (2009), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988). Other questions came from the literature and my directed research.

The protocols for the parents and teachers were piloted during the summer. I interviewed one teacher and one parent to help determine where the questions needed to be reworked. After reviewing the data from the pilot interviews, questions were adjusted to be less leading and to allow for some follow up questions. The final protocols are included in the appendix (Appendix A,B ) I will now discuss the specifics of the parent and teacher interviews separately.

### ***Parent interviews***

Parents were asked for a time that they could spend from 30 minutes to an hour with me talking about their child. Some interviews were conducted in the parents' homes, some in the office at school, and some at McDonald's. I was flexible in the place, time, and date to accommodate the parents. The parent interview protocol contained open ended questions, and follow up questions were included where needed for clarification. Transcripts of the interviews were presented to the parents for member checking. I had three parents respond with feedback, which was noted in analytical memos. Sonia's father came by and wanted to add some things to the interview. He wanted to talk more about when he came to Seam and some more facts about his military career. Jeffrey's mother added some demographic material, and Robin's mother corrected some typing errors.

### ***Teacher Interviews***

Teachers participated in two semi-structured interviews—the first mid-way through the student observation process and the second after they had read their students' individual "literacy stories." This interview asked the teachers to talk about their

classrooms and their definition of literacy. Questions about activities and curriculum were also included (see Appendix B for Teacher Interview Protocol). The second interview was divided into three sections so that the teacher would have time to read the student's "literacy story" and then share their thoughts with me. The teachers were asked what they thought about the stories and if there were any surprises. They were also asked if the stories had any impact on their literacy views (see Appendix B for Second Teacher Interview Protocol). Dividing the interview into three sections helped prevent any blending and interference from one student's story to another students' story.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

I analyzed data using qualitative techniques (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Each interview was transcribed and read several times to note trends and relationships. The data were then sorted into trend-based sets. Internal and external codes were developed to organize the chunks of information (Graue & Walsh, 1998). I began this process by looking at the data on home literacies and school literacy.

### **Analyzing data from parent interviews and observations**

In my literature review, I discussed that researchers often categorize literacy practices into two main groups. Korat (2005), Sénéchal et al. (2002), Whitehurst and Lonigan, (2001), Street (2003), and Gee (2004) use different terms to label their categories of literacy practices. Table 2 shows the different terms used by the researchers to classify their literacy skills and events. I reviewed these categories against the data in this study to determine which of these classifications would be most beneficial in my data analysis. The emerging units of related thoughts and trends in the data aligned best with the terms informal home literacies and school-type literacies.

When I began sorting and analyzing the data, I initially divided my data into the two categories I had developed from the literature: informal home literacy practices and

school-type literacy practices (see Table 3). Referring to my theoretical perspective of NLS and Vygotsky's socially constructed theory of learning, it became important to recognize that both types of literacies may occur in both the home and school setting. After grouping the data, I found that these categories were descriptive of the literacy event or activity, but did not reflect the underlying themes that were emerging from the observations and interviews nor my theoretical perspective. I then returned to the literature and looked for more specific codes to help organize and analyze the data.

Table 3 Terminologies used by researchers for home literacies and school literacies		
<u>Home Literacy terms</u>	<u>Researchers</u>	<u>School literacy terms</u>
Local	Street (2003)	Distant
Contextual	Korat (2005)	Non-contextual
Conceptual	Sénéchal et al. (2002)	Procedural
Outside-in	Whitehurst & Lonigan, (1998)	Inside-out
Life language	Gee (2004)	Academic language
Out of school literacies	Hull & Schultz (2002)	In school literacies
Informal home literacies	This study	School-type literacies

Studies conducted by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), Webster and Feiler (1998), Rodriguez-Brown (2009), Haney and Hill (2004), and Heath (1982) provided some of the external codes that were used to further categorize the data. These codes included reading, school-type skill activity, storybook reading, writing, books, singing, environmental print, and family events. Continual refining of the codes and categories used to sort the data and took place throughout the data analysis.

Each of the external codes was assigned a color (e.g., storybook reading—red; family interactions—brown). Using the highlighter function on the computer, I went through the transcripts and color coded the data according to their external codes. I then printed the transcript in large print font using a color printer. I cut the transcript apart and glued the strips on corresponding colored card stock. Each card was identified by participant name and date of observation or interview. These cards were then used to group and categorize the data to further identify trends and themes (Yin, 2003). This hands on method also helped me to focus on the data.

While coding the data, additional trends and patterns emerged from the literacy activities and events happening in the homes. From these patterns, a set of internal codes was developed. These codes included computer usage, technology, video games, awards, organization, routines, scaffolding, dramatic play, parenting style, conversations, and hospitality. An example of a literacy event that developed into an internal code was playing computer games. For example, when Israel and his brother were playing Wii, the themes of computer games, family interaction, and scaffolding were evidenced. Therefore, this event was coded using these three internal codes in addition to the external codes of family event and environmental print. This section of the transcript was then printed five times and cut apart to make data cards. The data cards, including both internal and external coding, were used to further analyze the data. Any reflections, thoughts, or insights that occurred during the data sorting were recorded in analytical memos. This helped me refocus on my research questions (Hatch, 2002).

I continued working with the data looking for relationships, subcategories, and additional themes. I used two interpretive approaches, “turning to theory” and “gatekeepers,” suggested by Wolcott (1994). First, I looked to theory to help me examine my data in the broader context. Specifically, I reviewed the literature on NLS

and Vygotsky's social construction theories to situate the data in my theoretical perspective. I also reviewed studies on home literacy practices, parent involvement programs, funds of knowledge, and the federal and grant mandates to ensure that I situated my analysis in the literature.

Second, I drew on advice from more knowledgeable others to add, delete, or expand on my interpretations (Wolcott, 1994). I discussed my study with fellow graduate students, my learning community, the teachers, and other administrators.

I also looked through the analytical notes I made during the data analysis and discussed my themes with fellow researchers. With these themes in mind, I reread the transcripts and data cards looking for contradictory evidence (Strauss, 1996; Wolcott, 1994).

### **Analyzing data from first teacher interview**

The procedures discussed to analyze the data from the parent interviews and observations also were used to analyze the teacher's interview. The external codes that were used evolved for my theoretical perspective of socially constructed literacy and NLS views on literacy. I specifically review the concepts of literacy being a process that is culturally and situationally bound taking place in multiple settings, rather than learning a set of skills (Street, 2003; Barton, 1994, Gee, 2004). I also looked to the literature on funds of knowledge, high-stakes teaching environments, early literacy development, and understanding teacher's practices. The following external codes were used: school-type literacy, home literacies, scaffolding, skills, activities, teacher beliefs, changes, knowledge of parents, knowledge of students, and external forces. After applying these codes to the transcripts using the same card method as described previously, I developed my internal codes. These included environment, SRC grant, staff development, CIRCLE, ways of learning about families, barriers to learning about families, home literacy

acknowledged, home literacy practices acknowledged but not recognized, and definition. These categories and themes continued to be revised as relationships and ideas began to form together to create even more ideas and implications.

### **Analyzing data from the second teacher interviews**

After the initial analysis of the observations and parent interviews, I wrote a narrative story about each student's literacy practices. I shared these with knowledgeable others including my community of learners, fellow graduate student, and a teacher not participating in the study. From their feedback, I wrote a final draft of the stories to share with the families for member checking to look for contradictions or misunderstandings on my part. After I revised the stories, a final draft was developed. These revised stories were shared with the teachers before their second interview. The data gathered from those interviews were transcribed, read and studied for commonalities and differences. This data was directly related to my third research question examining how knowing the "literacy stories" of their students would impact their literacy views and ideas. I reviewed the information from the NLS perspective on multiple literacies and the concept of literacy as contextual. I also reviewed the funds of knowledge literature and literature on early childhood literacies in this high-stakes environment. I used external and internal codes as described above to make connections and understand the data. From these, a preliminary research text was developed and shared with the teachers as part of member checking.

### **TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY**

Credibility is an important consideration in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 1998). I used triangulation, member checking, and feedback from fellow researchers to help develop credibility in the study. Data triangulation, in which multiple sources of data were used to create and to support descriptions, analyses, and

interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hatch, 2002), is the first step to establishing credibility in the study. The data from observations, interviews, member checking of literacy stories, and artifacts were triangulated to develop the findings. According to Mertens (1998), member checking is very important to building credibility. As part of the member checking process, I shared the transcripts with teachers and parents and invited their concerns and questions as well as feed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From the feed back from thoughts, revisions were be made to the final document. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process, I continued to ask for clarification and suggestions from participants and from fellow researchers.

#### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

For the protection of the participants and in accordance with the regulations of the Instructional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Austin, each participant was provided with the informed consent form. Each participant was given opportunities to ask questions about the study. Consent forms were signed and a copy of the form was given to each participant.

Because of my position as the campus administrator where these pre-kindergarten classrooms are located, I explained up front to my participants the purpose of this study and assured both teacher and parent participants that this was an activity outside of my duties as the campus administrator. As stated earlier, the teachers were selected from volunteers who felt comfortable with me in their classroom. It should also be noted that because of my position in the school, I viewed the teachers as learners that were developing their teaching skills and views. Therefore, the discussions of the teachers' practices were discussed as objectively as possible focusing on what was visible more than what was expected. Parents were also volunteers who understood that the study would not have any implications on their child or child's education.



As the primary researcher for this study, the responsibility was mine to ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical manner (Anderson, 1998). Participants' names and the names of the district and school were replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' and school's identity. In addition, any data that would lead to the identification of the students was not used in the findings of the study. For example, there were literacy practices occurring in the religious life of one family, which were not included in the findings section of this dissertation to preserve the anonymity of the participants. The church affiliation and activity would have connected the participant in the study to their real identity.

## **SUMMARY**

In conclusion, this dissertation study used a framework of socio-cultural language development to examine the home literacies of a sample of pre-kindergarten students in a public school program. Using qualitative methods, this study identified the literacies and literacy practices of this group of students. After identifying these literacies, the study examined the teachers' definition of literacy and their literacy practices. Finally, this study focused on how the reactions of the teachers to their students' "literacy stories" and how they felt that would impact their future views and use of home literacy practices. This study provided qualitative insights that can be used to help teachers develop methods of helping students bridge the gap from their home literacies to school literacies. The importance of developing this knowledge is punctuated by the continued gap in achievement between students from LSES families and their counterparts (Carrington & Luke, 2003). Also, the strong focus on academics in pre-kindergarten standards adds importance to expanding the current research on the multiple literacies that need to be valued for all students to be successful in today's schools.

## **Chapter 4: What's in their Literacy Backpack?**

Current research states that literacy begins at birth (NELP, 2008), establishing the home as the primary environment and social context for the development of children's early literacy practices (Neumann 2009; Auerbach, 1989). The home's contribution to young children's literacy development goes "beyond a general recognition of the importance of literacy; parents support it (literacy) in specific ways" thereby creating specific skills and literacy practices (Auerbach, 1989, p. 170). This chapter addresses what some of these home literacies are, what they look like, and how they relate to future learning.

Home literacies must be utilized and valued by teachers and schools to insure the success of all children in early literacy development. Auerbach (1989) points out that "[the] teacher's role is to connect what happens inside the classroom to what happens outside so that literacy can become a meaningful tool for addressing the issues in students' lives" (p. 166). This is only one part of the teacher's role in participating in their students' literacy development. Another part is for the teacher to connect what happens in the home and community to the happenings in the classroom. By examining their students' literacy practices, both at home and at school, teachers will be better prepared to craft literacy events bridging the two contexts. Including the rich literacy practices and events of the home in their lesson planning allows students to build upon current skills while learning new ones.

The purpose of this study was to identify home literacy events and practices of the focal students and to explore their teachers' literacy constructs before and after reading their students' individual literacy stories. Findings from this study will be examined in the next two chapters. In this chapter, I address the first guiding research question by

identifying literacies that occurred in the homes of the pre-kindergartners. The themes that are shared in this chapter, which focus on the context and specifics of individual families, developed across the case studies.

Chapter 5 will address research questions two and three by examining the literacy practices of the two teachers and their perceptions about each student's literacy story and its connection to their teaching.

### **Identification of Home Literacies**

Neumann, Neumann, and Hood (2009) point out that parents are “well placed to facilitate emergent literacy development in their children before formal reading and writing begins at school” (p. 257). The importance placed on specific literacy events and practices by Auerbach (1989) underscores the need to identify and examine specific home literacies. Much of the research (Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Auerbach, 1989; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001) addresses home literacies, but does not “spell out” examples of the practices that children engage in while at home, particularly with pre-kindergarten students in public school. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature by examining and identifying the literacy practices and events in the home and community of six pre-kindergarten students.

Researchers often place early literacy practices in two major categories—home literacies or school-type literacies (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). For this study, all events that occurred in the home or immediate community were viewed as home literacies whether they were typical school-type literacies (e.g. learning letters) or traditional home literacies (e.g. bedtime routines). Emphasis was placed on the use and context of the literacy event (Gee, 1996). Data from several different contexts (e.g. church, home, McDonald's, Wal-Mart) were collected and explored across six families.

In analyzing the data from observations and interviews, four basic themes of home literacies emerged: relationship literacies, routine literacies, digital literacies, and school-type literacies. Within each theme, there were sub-themes that further explained and helped to identify home literacy practices. Using data from the six families, I discuss these themes and the home literacies that fall into each category. Each major theme was visible in all six families; however, the sub-themes varied among the families creating unique literacy stories for each student (see Appendix E).

### **RELATIONSHIP LITERACIES**

Israel and his brother are friends, best friends. Even though he (Israel) and his brother are very different in their mannerisms and behaviors, they are so much alike. They play together and do everything together. They both love school and enjoy reading and writing. Israel wants to be just like his brother, especially in being able to read. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Bernice, Israel's mother, described this example of a family dynamic that produced opportunities for relationship literacies to occur. Relationship home literacies are those literacy events and practices that are spontaneous, everyday events which occur between the pre-kindergartners and others in their lives. Gee's (1996) description of literacy as socially bound and contextual occurrences situates home literacies in the middle of family relationships, interactions, and daily life. These literacy practices develop from each family member's actions and interactions on a daily basis. Taylor (1981) found that literacies in the homes of successful readers did not add activities to their family agendas, but that the practices have "evolved as part of everyday life" (1981, p. 101). Brooker (2002) states that many typical, high-quality "literacy events" (Heath, 1983) are recorded in households where "children share in spontaneous everyday literacy practices" including playing games, using print, and playing school (p. 294). This sharing of everyday literacy practices resulted in many relationship literacies in the homes of the pre-kindergartners.

Several sub-themes developed during my analysis of the data in the category of relational literacies. The sub-themes that emerged examined the context and use of the relational literacies. These included scaffolding practices, play, and support practices.

### **Relationship literacies and scaffolding**

Sonia and her sister were playing in the family room. Mom asked if the girls wanted to show me their Halloween costumes. They ran off to get the costumes. They both had Princess costumes. Sonia had trouble with her crown and her sister showed her how to get it to stay. Sonia suggested that they take a picture. Her sister got the digital camera and took a picture of her. She showed it to me. Now it was Sonia's turn. She could not get the camera to work. Her sister began to explain exactly what to do. She led her step by step until Sonia was successful in taking the picture. (Field notes, October 7, 2009)

Relationship literacies in the home are practices that the families formed as they went about their daily lives. In the prior vignette, Sonia's sister helped her take a picture. She scaffolded Sonia's learning to use the camera successfully. Scaffolding, a term based on Vygotsky's theories and coined by Brunner (1976), refers to the type of assistance or help that is given to the child that enables the learner to achieve a task that they cannot immediately do alone. This scaffolding is then removed so that the learner can accomplish the task independently. In Vygotsky's words, "What the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 211). With her sister's help, Sonia was able to use the camera to record an experience. Later, she was able to take other pictures without any of her sister's assistance.

Scaffolding was a literacy practice present in all of the six pre-kindergartner's homes. Examples from the data showed a practice among the family members of scaffolding each other's learning in different ways. Scaffolding happened between the pre-kindergartener and siblings and between the pre-kindergartener and other family members such as mother, father, grandparents, or cousins. Scaffolding was used in literacy events and produced multiple literacy practices.

## ***Siblings***

Scaffolding between siblings was visible in participant families with more than one child. An example of scaffolding by an older brother was evident during a visit to Israel's home. At the beginning of the visit, Israel was playing *Wii Bowling* alone. His brother, Eduardo, came over and asked to play, too. Israel quickly agreed and tried to go to the menu to change the game to a two-player game, but encountered trouble. The following scenario occurred:

As Israel tried to change the parameters of the game to allow two players, he became frustrated when it did not work.

Mom said, "Just take turns."

Eduardo interjected, "No, he knows how to change it, Mom."

As Israel continued to try to change the game, Mom again suggested that they just take turns using the same remote. Israel started over one more time following the written directions and icons as his brother pointed out when he made a wrong choice and needed to select a new one. At one point, the opportunity to choose a new game came up. Eduardo suggested that they pick a new game and set it for two players. Israel agreed and picked the *Sponge Bob* game which he successfully set for two players. (Field notes, March 16, 2010)

In this scenario, Eduardo, as the older brother, provided the help Israel needed to navigate the game menu. Following the menu prompts by reading the icons and words is a literacy event and skill that is built into video games. Eduardo did not push Israel to let him do it or to hurry and reset the game for two. He allowed Israel to pace himself and pointed out when Israel needed to change his choice on the menu. Finally, when an alternative path to two players showed itself, Eduardo suggested that as a way out. Israel was still successful, not in changing the bowling game to two players, but in setting a new game for two players. Now, he and his brother were able to play at the same time. Through scaffolding, Israel used the text of the game to solve a problem. He also

practiced his literacy skills of listening and following directions, thus creating practices that could be used at home and in the classroom.

Gregory (2001) states that interactions with siblings provide opportunities for the development of literacy practices. She advocates that regardless of whether the student is the older or younger sibling, interactions between the two offer opportunities to either practice their skills or create new ones. In the previous scenario, Israel, with his brother's help, successfully changed the parameters of the game. Eduardo had the opportunity to use his abilities to give directions, problem solve, and mediate. The give and take of this learning practice will follow Israel to school and provide the framework for working in centers, small groups, and on projects.

Scaffolding is also evident in the play of Robin and her sisters. Having both older and younger siblings, Robin experienced both sides of the sibling scaffolding—apprentice and expert (Vygotsky, 1978). On my first visit to her home, Robin and her sisters demonstrated this as they played with a deck of cards.

Robin got the cards out of my literacy bag; her older sister, Tonya, took them from her with no response from Robin.

Tonya began to teach Robin how to play cards, making up the game as she went along. Robin was an eager participant, saying the card's number was "6999", each time Tonya would tell her the correct number or letter for face cards. They continued to play until Tonya took the cards to her dad and started a game with him. Tonya was the expert as she scaffolded Robin, the apprentice, to learn to play the card game. Later, when her younger sister, Carla, wanted to play cards, Robin was the one telling her what to do, making up the numbers as she went along. She had become the expert and her younger sister was now the apprentice. Robin repeated the practice that Tonya had modeled for her. (Field notes, October 27, 2009)

Even though the letters and numbers may not have been correct, Robin experienced game-playing and symbol recognition both when she was the student and when she was the teacher. Scaffolding and being scaffolded is a literacy practice that Robin will take to

her pre-kindergarten class providing the basis for working in groups, helping other students, and playing in centers.

### ***Family members***

Scaffolding occurred not only between siblings, but also between the participant and other family members—parents, cousins, and grandparents. Sonia and her family demonstrated scaffolding of many literacy practices among all the family members in their home. One of these literacy practices was to sing songs and chant rhymes together. Sonia taught her parents and sister several new songs she had learned at school. Sonia's dad described the following experience:

He explained, "I think that what they do at school is connected to what we do at home because she will come home and tell us about activities like the ABC songs.

She will say, 'Listen, I learned a new song' and then go on to teach all of us.

We know the color song, BLUE, and the Christmas songs."

Dad began to sing the BLUE song "The Ocean is blue" and Mom joined in as well as Sonia and her sister. They continued to scaffold each other supplying words and motions for each other. (Interview, December 16, 2009).

The entire family learned the songs that Sonia brought home from school. At first, Sonia was the expert scaffolding her other family members as they learned the songs. As they learned the songs, they began to help each other when one of them would forget a word or phrase. Each family member alternated between apprentice and expert roles as they participated in singing and chanting.

Lily and Robin also shared songs with their families, songs both from school and others that had been part of their family's culture. Lily's mother talked about a song that she and Lily sang that was unusual. She sang it for me during her interview and commented on how the teacher had asked her to share the song with the class (Interview, January 13, 2010).



Singing provided multiple opportunities to develop literacy skills and practices. It also provided an avenue for sharing from home to school and from school to home. Some of these literacy skills included memorization, rhyming, interjection of words, and choral singing. Literacy practices of using language for enjoyment and the sharing of learned material are practices that the students can use in their interactions at school.

Interacting with their siblings and parents through scaffolding provided literacy opportunities for all of the participants. Used in a variety of contexts, scaffolding helped the participants practice and/or learn new information or skills. This way of learning is very similar to what the pre-kindergartners will experience in school during small groups and learning centers. The students can build on this practice from home to interact in school activities and learn new literacy skills. Providing opportunities for these types of learning situations to occur might help build a bridge between home and school.

### **Relationship literacies found in play**

“Do you want to have a tea party?” asked Robin. “Mama says it’s okay.”

Robin ran downstairs and came back with a bag of pretzels. She passed out toy cups and plates matching them up by size. She had a toy teapot that she used to pour “pretend tea.”

I asked what we were going to eat and Robin responded, “Pretzels, see it says it right here.” Robin was pointing to the letters on the bag.

Robin continued to ask me what else I wanted to eat, offering imaginary food to go with the real pretzels. (Field notes, November 3, 2009)

Play provided a venue for the participants to develop and practice literacy skills in a context that was non-threatening and supportive (Roskos & Neumann, 1998). This example of a dramatic play experience is one of the many play activities that occurred in the homes of the participants which helped develop the students’ skills in carrying on conversations, asking and answering questions, and interacting with texts. Data from the

families showed several types of play including structured play such as games and dramatic play.

### ***Games***

Playing games, either board games, card games, or digital games, was a literacy practice in several of the homes. An example of literacy development through play was found in Israel's and his brother's card game.

Israel took out the cards from my literacy bag. He and his brother sat down on the floor in front of me. Israel proceeded to pull out the directions and said,

“These are our directions.” He looked at the directions as if to read them, put the card down, and made up his own directions as he went along. Israel and Eduardo began to play Israel's version of Battle. They each put down a card and then decided which card won. Israel had a six and then stopped and wanted to know if it was a nine or a six. Eduardo told him it was a six and showed him the line under the number. Eduardo helped Israel figure out which number was greater on occasion, but Israel chose the bigger card about 90% of the time with no help. The brothers discussed several of the face cards to decide which the bigger one was. They took turns making that decision. (Field notes, November 19, 2009)

Israel and his brother were engaged in a semi-structured play activity with rules they created. This game-playing event provided opportunities for both brothers to strengthen many of their literacy skills including questioning and answering skills, turn-taking skills, and discussion abilities. They also were able to practice several concepts such as number identification, quantity, and decision making. Playing cards was a common activity in Israel's home. He commented that his grandfather taught him to play cards and added that he also played with his Dad.

Marcos and his mother also liked to play games. They had several games in their home; some of them were board games such as Candy Land and others were enhanced with technology. During one of my visits, Marcos and his mom were playing a digital form of Operation. The following interaction took place:

Mom asked Marcos if he wanted to play Sponge Bob – Operation. She told him to go and get it from under the microwave. He was able to pick out the game from all the others. When they were playing, Marcos would draw a card and show his mother. She would begin to read the word and stop and let him finish it. Then, Marcos would extract the “bone” that the card called for. Mom and Marcos continued to take turns until all the bones were gone. Marcos modified the rules to be sure that he was successful. (Field notes, November 11, 2009)

Opportunities to engage in pre-reading occurred in the event explained above. While playing Sponge Bob – Operation, Mom had naturally encouraged him to use his phonological awareness skills to identify the “bone” on the card. Marcos also was able to match the card to the piece on the game. Bergen and Mauer (2000) also found this relationship between play and children’s phonological awareness development in their three-year longitudinal study. In addition, the familiar setting of the game allowed Marcos to feel comfortable to make guesses and move beyond his current skills, a literacy practice that he can utilize at school as well as at home.

### ***Dramatic Play***

Another type of play is dramatic play. Gregory (2001) noted one of the most common practices occurring in formal role play is “playing school.” Sonia, Lily, and Robin exemplified this type of play when they played school with their siblings and neighbors. The following description by Sonia’s mother provides an example of what “playing school” is at her house.

They play school all the time. Sofia is always in charge. She is the teacher. They have their own chairs, and we have the chalkboard, too. Sofia will come up to the blackboard and be just like what she learns at school.

She says, “The lesson today is...”

Sometimes they argue because Sonia wants to be the teacher. When she asks Sofia why she can’t be the teacher, Sofia answers “Because I am older than you. I’m in kinder and you are in Pre-K.” (Interview, December 16, 2009)

Playing school offered the opportunity for the children to participate in school-like settings in a familiar, safe environment. Gregory (2001) points out that “playing school” allows the participants to experience translating the school vocabulary and practices into their own personal practices. By practicing with and teaching each other, the children are able to make the school routines, vocabulary, and other practices part of their own personal or home practices. In Sonia’s mother’s description of her daughters playing school, examples of this were noted. According to Mom, many times “playing school” started with, “Today our lesson is...” She summed up this idea by saying, “Sofia will...be just like what she learns at school” (Interview, December 16, 2009). Skills are often learned during “playing school” as part of the experience.

“Playing school” is only one of the many role-playing activities that occurred in the homes of the participants. Israel had many character-type toys such as super-hero figures, firemen, and vehicles in his play room. He also had dress up clothes such as hats and boots. His mother said that he and his brother liked to play pretend. (Field notes, March 16, 2010) Taking on pretend roles allowed Israel to experiment with new languages and situations. Sometimes he used scripts that were derived from his watching television shows or movies. Also, by using props and toys in their pretend play, the brothers were engaging in symbolic play which develops their language and literacy skills (Saracho, 2003).

Role playing, which is a part of dramatic play, also allows the children to take on other “voices” and make them part of their own voice. This was seen in the way Jeffrey played pretend with his cars. He was able to take on the characters of the cars and act out the story from the movie *Cars*. He enjoyed using the cars to engage in a conversation with other cars, often taking on both parts. He used the language from the movie and incorporated it into his own language. (Field notes, October 19, 2009) Marsh and

Millard (2000) add that not only does dramatic play develop language and literacy, but it also helps develop the students' confidence. This was demonstrated by James when he included me in his play and instructed me on specific words I should say.

Play promotes children's literacy development (Feiler, 2005; Volk, 1999; Saracho, 2003). It enables young children to "assume a variety of roles and learn about their social world, communicate their ideas and dispositions, and negotiate social problems with their peers" (Saracho & Spodek, 2006). These are part of the literacy practices that students take with them to school. The examples discussed above are only representative of the many opportunities the participants had to engage in play situations.

The play experiences differed across the families, each reflecting their particular family dynamic and culture. Marcos and Israel engaged in digital game playing with their families. Robin, Sonia, and Lily played traditional games and enjoyed dramatic play together with their families while Jeffrey and his family favored a more structured play. These play events served to form multiple literacy practices which included using details to decipher words and meanings, interacting with texts or scripts and making them their own, using environmental print, using symbols in varying contexts, and asking and answering questions. Other literacy practices and skills were learning phonological and writing skills, developing attitudes about literacy and school, and taking on other's points of view. These home literacy practices are a part of the knowledge and attitudes the participants have to help them navigate through school.

### **Relationship literacies and support**

I would like Jeffrey to have a worldly knowledge not just learning about letters and then learning about numbers. We try to make him a part of everything we do. He is so smart. He repeats and remembers pretty much everything that we show him so we fill him with as much as we can. (Interview, November 3, 2009)

The desire to be supportive of their children was not only expressed by Jeffrey's mother, but was found across all the participants' literacy stories. Morrow and Paratore (1993) state that all parents want their children to be successful in literacy development. Hannon and Nutbrown (1997), in their framework for parents, state that parents should give recognition to their student's literacy achievements and practices. The pre-kindergartners in this study received support from their parents, their families, and their teachers. Parents in this study showed their support in several ways, including valuing their work, acknowledging their accomplishments and special awards, and developing positive relationships with their teacher.

### ***Valuing students' work***

Recognition of their student's achievements was well documented in the data from all six families. Israel's mother said that she had saved every paper and project that he has brought home from pre-k. She explained,

We put it (work) on the refrigerator for that week. Then, we have a big filing cabinet, and it has Eduardo's side and his (Israel) side. I have kept pretty much everything; we probably should not keep everything. If I do have to throw it away, like if it is food or something, I never throw it away in front of them. I just put it up. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

The work that Jeffrey, Sonia, Robin, and Lily bring home is also kept by their mothers. Lily's mother said that she was planning on making a scrapbook for Lily; when she is older we can look back and see what she did in pre-kindergarten. Robin's mother talked about how she handled the work that Robin brought home.

Depends. Some of it is on the fridge. I keep all her paintings. Some of it goes in a book that I keep. I have all of her best work in the book. She actually says, "Oh, this ought to go in my book," and then I let her put it in a page protector in the book. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

By allowing Robin to participate in deciding what to keep, Robin's mother is helping her value her own work. Encouraging their children to value their own work was also a

literacy practice for Israel and his family. Israel and his brother would get to choose which work products stayed on the refrigerator and which ones went in the filing cabinet. Mom explained,

We talk about the work that he brought home. Then, I would tell him that he did a good job, and he would say, “Really, I did a good job? I did do a good job.” Then we either put it on the refrigerator or in the cabinet. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

By providing opportunities for Israel and Robin to discuss their own work and make decisions about it, this created a practice of reflection and decision making that can be used when evaluating their work at school.

### ***Special Awards***

Recognizing their children’s special awards was a literacy practice found across the case studies. All six of the families made it a practice to attend the award assemblies and other special events at the school. Additionally, the awards that the children received at these assemblies represented a text that the families honored and valued. Lily’s mother expressed this during one of my visits. She was very proud of how she had recently decorated Lily’s room.

At a recent garage sale, she bought a lamp to go between the beds and two “show” dolls for their dresser. She had also found a picture frame that she had used for Lily’s Super Duckling certificate. She had hung the framed certificate in the center of one wall. On the other wall was the art work Lily had done at school. Ms. A said she wanted to get some more frames for the other awards Lily had received. She said that she was “so proud” and hoped that she would continue to “do good and get more awards.” (Field notes, November 14, 2009)

The physical placement of Lily’s awards not only showed the importance that her mother placed on her accomplishments, but served as reminders of her expectation of “continuing to do good.”

Sonia’s parents showed pride in her work. Sonia’s father said that he was “always impressed with the amount and type of projects that she brought home as well as

the awards she received." He went on to explain, "There is so much more for children to learn today; they have to do more and learn more. My wife and I always tell her, 'You did all this today? You worked very hard.'" (Interview, December 16, 2009). He also added that they think it is important to keep all of their awards. He said, "It is all a part of their record—the Super Duckling awards and the Classy Conduct awards" (Interview, December 16, 2009).

Marcos' mother felt that it was very important to be at awards assemblies and school functions. She said that she and her husband had been to almost everything. When asked why she answered, "He (Marcos) asks us to go. He tells me and he asks if I am going to be there for him. I want to be there for him." (Interview, November 2009). Even though Marcos' mother said that she "hated school," she made every effort to support her son.

Each family in the study showed their children that they valued their work and efforts at school. The support that the parents gave their children through their saving and displaying of their work and their acknowledgement of the students' special awards provides a framework for the students' motivation and work ethics. They will know how to show pride in the work they do at school and how to honor the work their classmates accomplish.

### ***Teacher relationships***

Similarly, each parent in this study developed a relationship with their child's teacher and supported the child's relationship with the teacher. Each family shared experiences of how their teachers were part of their everyday life at home as well as at school through stories, songs, conversations, notes, letters, and references to what the teachers say. These relationships served as a source of support for their child.



Robin's mother said that Ms. C knew Robin exceptionally well. She attributed this knowledge to the fact that she and the teacher communicated often and that Ms. C took an interest in Robin and listens to her. She described this relationship when she said, "Oh, Ms. C walks on water. I don't think Ms. C can do anything wrong in Robin's eyes. In fact, we have had to say a few times, what would Ms. C think?" (Interview, January, 7, 2010).

Lily's mother shared that she felt it was very important for Lily and her teacher to have a good relationship. She said,

I think it is very important for the teacher and the student to have a relationship because if that student is not comfortable with that teacher, and if that teacher is not comfortable with that student I don't think that they will have that connection for her to learn. (Interview, January 13, 2010)

She laughingly added, "I am not going to say that I am not jealous because I am. She comes in and says, 'Ms. C this, Ms. C that, me and Ms. C this and that.' It is repeatedly."

The participants all had good relationships with their teachers. The importance of this was summed up by Jeffrey's mom when she described his reaction to a change in teacher. She said,

He was so connected to Mrs. S. With the new teacher, at first there was not a connection. You could really tell the difference. He went from "Oh, school is great" to "I don't want to go to school." But soon, he learned to love his new teacher. You know kids can tell if you really care. You can't fool them. Thank goodness they hit it off. (Interview, November 3, 2009)

The students' families felt that it was very important to support their children's learning. This support provided by the families created an overall positive general emotional climate that facilitated the development of language and early literacy development (Roberts et al., 2005). The framework and support for literacy development provided by the teachers at school added to family support and fostered a positive learning environment for the students. This atmosphere of support and shared desired for the pre-

kindergartners to learn literacy skills can be used by students, families, and teachers to create an environment or space for the students to feel positive about learning and engaging in new literacy experiences.

Relationship literacies emerged in the data from all six pre-kindergartners' homes. The literacy practices that developed from the children's interactions with their families at home became the literacy practices that could bridge to the pre-kindergarten classroom. The practice of learning from others and helping others learn can be used at school when they interact with their teachers and other students. Play was a context where all of the children practiced their multiple literacies of oral language including the language of school as they "played school" and interacted with symbolic materials such as game pieces and props. The overarching relationship was the support that they received from their families in their school activities and all their school work and activities. Pahl and Roswell (1995) point out that home is where children learn many of their literacy skills and that the relationship and support from the families provides the necessary framework for this to occur. Robin's mother summed it up by saying, "We want her to be successful in school. We do whatever we can to be there for her and help." (Interview, November 3, 2009) This desire for their children to be successful in school showed in all the families through their interactions and relationships with each other and the school.

#### **ROUTINE LITERACIES**

Mom called the girls to the laundry room in the back of the house. She told them that one of them could push the button and one could close the door. They needed to decide. Then she sent them to get their laundry basket. They came back both carrying the basket. Both girls put their clothes in the washing machine; Lily pushed the button after her sister had closed the door. (Field notes, November 14, 2009)

Lily and her sister worked as an integral part of their family by doing household chores, following routines, and participating in many other practical everyday activities. Stephens points out that involving children in everyday living experiences helps them develop literacy skills and practices and helps them discover the “usefulness of language” (2000, p. 1). Everyday routines which emerged during the observations and interviews occurred in four common contexts across the case studies. These were household daily routines, after school practices, mealtime routines, and bedtime routines.

### **Household daily routines**

Like Lily, all the pre-kindergartners in this study were involved in helping around the house. Jeffrey often helped with the laundry. His mother explained, “We try to make him a part of everything, even doing the laundry. We make them bring in their clothes and it is kind of work, but to them it is fun” (Interview, November 3, 2009). Israel was responsible for feeding the dog every day, Marcos and Sonia for keeping their rooms clean, and Robin for keeping her part of her room clean and her toys put away in their designated places. By participating in activities from start to finish, the pre-kindergartners increased attention span and concentration and developed the practice of completing tasks (Stephens, 2003). Doing household chores routinely also helped the children to develop the concept of sequencing. Viewing activities as doing something first, next, and last provides a framework for beginning storytelling and writing. All these skills developed through the home practices revolving around chores provide opportunities for building more traditional literacy skills.

### ***Chores***

These practices of performing simple chores that add value to their home helps foster the development of many literacy skills. Lawhon and Cobb (2000) point out that children’s literacy abilities grow when there are “opportunities to see, share, act, sing,

classify, observe, make decisions, develop sequencing skills, recognize and understand relationships, read and tell stories, interact, talk, list and play” (p. 113). Participating in household chores, such as the ones described, provide these opportunities. Jeffrey’s mother summed up this concept when she pointed out that their family practice was to include Jeffrey and his sister in all that they do so they can gain self-confidence and skills while they think they are playing. Household chores allowed the pre-kindergartners to develop literacy practices such as following directions, working together to learn, following sequences, and reading the environment as they participated in daily activities.

### ***Errands***

Running errands, paying bills, and grocery shopping are everyday chores that develop literacy practices. Israel and his Mom often take care of errands on their way home from school. Mom says that she writes everything down that she needs to do. Mom commented, “Israel likes to hold the list and check things off, especially at the store” (Interview, January 7, 2010). Seeing writing as a tool in real life situations provided Israel with an understanding of the value and uses of writing. Grocery shopping and bill paying offer many opportunities to interact with texts including environmental print. During a trip to Wal-Mart with Jeffrey and his family, I observed him pointing to many items and calling out the names of them. Jeffrey explained that he could read a lot of words, especially ones in the store. Jeffrey felt confident in his “reading” ability and was eager to share all the words he knew. Observing print and interacting with many different kinds of text (e.g. labels, billboards, and signs) develops a “rich knowledge of print” that can be taken to the classroom. Teachers can add the “missing pieces of knowledge” to enable children to learn formal reading and writing skills (Purcell-Gates, 1995, p. 197).

### **After school routines**

I know just what to do when I get home. I take my folder out of my backpack and Mom checks it and signs it. Then I hang it there.” Lily explained as she pointed to the pegs on the wall. (Field notes, November 11, 2009)

Simple routines, like the one Lily described, were followed every day by the pre-kindergartners in this study. Routines provided the pre-kindergartners with structure, organization, and a sense of security. Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005) explain that parents who provide this structure facilitate children’s language and literacy development. Pahl and Rowsell (2005) add that there are many events in the home which happen repeatedly that develop literacy practices. These iterative events, such as the routines children follow after school, serve as the bases for multiple literacy practices.

### ***Backpacks and folders***

Lily was very proud that she knew what to do when she came in from school and, according to Mom, she does it everyday. Having daily routines provided structure for Lily and helped her be able to predict what would happen next. Lily knew that after her folder was put up she was able to color or watch television. Routines provided Lily with some control over her environment and increased her self-confidence. Remembering and being able to follow routines is a practice that can be built upon to master the routines of formal literacy.

Similar after school practices were found across the data. Sonia, Israel, and Jeffrey had after school routines much like Lily’s. Sonia has pegs by her front door at a height that she can easily reach. Israel went to his grandmother’s work for a while after school, and the first thing that he did was to give his backpack to her and discuss what was in the folder. Jeffrey, who rode the school bus, had a special place by the door for his backpack. After putting up their backpacks, the students all mentioned giving their folder to their mothers. The folder, which contained a calendar with important dates,

their behavior chart, newsletters, and their work, was the daily communication between home and school. It was an important part of the literacy practices of their homes. Developing a routine way to interact with this important text not only allowed the children to practice control, but it also demonstrated communication as a literacy practice in their home. It emphasized the consistency and importance of sharing school and home through written text.

### ***Snacks***

After dealing with the folders, each of the students had a snack. This routine time allowed for conversation, questioning, and discussion of many topics. Each of the parents put emphasis on providing a snack after school. Israel's grandmother brought several snacks with her to work so that he could make a choice. Sonia, Robin, and Marcos all enjoyed a snack chosen from foods that they found at home. Jeffrey's snack was part of a strict diet that he was on. His mother used choosing his snack as a reward for good behavior on his calendar. Lily's mother used snack time as an opportunity to go over skills that Ms. C had said that Lily needed to work on. The following vignette of snack time shows Mom's desire to maintain routines and provided literacy opportunities.

Each girl had a plate with two graham crackers, a spoonful of peanut butter, and a few slices of apple. Mom said that she wanted to work with the girls at snack time because she was working at night. Often she had to plan around her work schedule to include all of the routines and activities that they normally do. During a parent-teacher conference, Ms. C had mentioned that Lily needed to work on her letters. Mom had gotten flash cards to work with Lily on her letters. She said, "I want to see if the girls can learn this way." She placed the flash cards in stacks in front of Lily and asked her the letters as she ate her snack. She did this about three times and then put them away. She then began to visit with Lily and talk about her day. (Field notes, October 22, 2009)

Snack time provided an opportunity for Lily to practice her letter identification and oral language skills. These are important early literacy skills that "have a clear and strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills" (National Early Literacy Panel,

2010, p. 4). All of the after school routines provided opportunities for the children to practice other skills noted by the NELP as important to later literacy development including following directions, remembering prior activities, and understanding what others are saying. Incorporating these skills into the daily practices in the home provides a foundation for other literacy skills to develop.

### **Mealtime routines**

The plates and forks were on the table ready to be passed out for dinner. Jeffrey asked if I was going to stay and eat. He said that they had cornbread and chili. Jeffrey explained that he had helped make the cornbread. He said, “This is how you make cornbread. First, you put stuff in and stir it and then put it in the oven. It’s cornbread.” (Field notes, October 29, 2009)

This partial vignette showing part of Jeffrey’s typical routine revolving around dinner time is a common element in all these pre-kindergartners’ families. American families seem to see family mealtime as a very vital and powerful tool in fostering family unity. One focus of family mealtime is the conversation that takes place. These conversations provide multiple opportunities for families to share values, and “acquaint children with social and cultural norms” (Beals, 2001). Mealtime also provided opportunities for the children to participate in routines and perform their own specific responsibilities. Although these practices looked different in each of the students’ homes, each family used mealtime to teach and communicate with each other.

### ***Responsibility and participation***

As depicted in the previous vignette, Jeffrey participated in the mealtime preparations. He passed out the eating utensils, plates, and napkins making sure everyone had what they needed. Lily also was involved in helping prepare for mealtime in a more limited way. Her mom explained, “I don’t let them help much, yet. All we do is put the paper plates down that’s it. They like to grab the paper towels and put that down. And then they will sit down and eat” (Interview, January 13, 2010). Lily and Jeffrey both got

to practice one-to-one correspondence which is valuable in reading as well as math. While participating in an important family practice they were developing self-confidence and responsibility both of which are important literacy practices.

Cooking offered multiple literacy opportunities. Sonia and Robin sometimes helped with preparing the meals and cooking treats like cookies. Following recipes and matching words with the actual ingredients gives print real world importance. Israel's mother talked about how he liked to help her cook.

Israel loves to help out. He likes to cook anything, but he really likes to cook Hamburger Helper. We are big step followers. When I cook I do read the instructions or recipes step by step. I don't just throw everything in. I wish I could. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Literacy practices that are developed around the preparation of meals will serve as bridges to more formal literacy development. Stephens (2003) comments on the importance of home activities that develop literacy skills needed to achieve at school. She points out that developing verbal competence is one important skill that can be developed around mealtimes. Others include the sequencing involved in following a recipe that Israel's mother mentioned. Cause and effect, completion of tasks, and learning environmental print words are other literacy skills that are utilized during preparing for mealtime and cooking which can serve as frameworks for learning formal literacy skills.

### ***Conversation***

Stephens (2003) also stresses that families talking to each other around the dinner table, fast food table, or eating in the car help develop the children's ability to express ideas and "use increasingly complex vocabulary and sentence structure" (p. 1). Robin's mother talked about how their family used dinner time to share their day and to key into what their children were doing at school. She explained,



Her Dad and I always share what we did that day so that the children will know what we are doing. Then, we let them tell us about their day. They tell us what they talked about with their friends on the playground. What they did. We use it just to kind of get filled in on their lives. (Interview, December 16, 2009)

Sonia's family made sure that they had at least one meal a day together. Her dad remarked, "For meal time we all eat together. I know a lot families don't do that because of schedules. We all—my son and our two daughters—sit down and have a meal together." He went on to say that this gave them time to share their day and talk about things that interested them. Mealtime provided Sonia with multiple opportunities to learn to listen and respond to questions as well as craft her own story to share.

Conversation around dinner at McDonald's also showed the many literacy skills that occur across the table whether it is at or outside the home. Marcos enjoyed talking to both his mother and me on our visit to McDonald's. As he ate his chicken nuggets and french fries, he talked about school and about the toy in his Happy Meal. He easily interjected his ideas into Mom's and my conversation about reading night. Marcos shared his favorite activity from reading night and explained why he liked it best. He was able to listen, comprehend the conversation, and then formulate an appropriate comment to add. This practice forms a strong foundation for comprehension and writing skills. He also was developing the literacy practice of attending to just one speaker or train of thought picked out of all the other conversations and noises going on around him. He can build on this practice when he is expected to learn in the classroom with many children and a variety of activities going on at the same time.

Israel also engaged in conversation over a Happy Meal at McDonald's. His conversations included numerous questions. In fact, at one point, Mom told him that he asked too many questions. Israel knew the difference between a question and a statement. When he wanted information he asked questions of specific people including his mother, brother, and me. Israel asked me questions such as "Why are you not

eating?” and “What does diet mean?” (Field notes, February 4, 2010). Asking for explanations or definitions when he did not understand demonstrated his literacy practices of using conversations to not only learn new vocabulary but to seek new information. Mom also reinforced her values and literacy routines involving conversations when she redirected Israel to respond to me. She said, “Israel, listen to what she is asking you. You need to answer the question she asked and stop being silly.” Israel quickly refocused on our conversation and answered appropriately (Field notes, February 4, 2010). Similar to these mealtime routines and practices, Israel will engage in discussions that include asking and answering questions in pre-kindergarten.

Mealtime routines experienced by all of the students provided opportunities to develop literacy practices that will enable them to make connections from home to school. Participating in discussions during mealtimes uses the same skills that are needed to participate in school discussions during guided readings or whole group activities. Asking for explanations provided multiple opportunities to learn new vocabulary. This vocabulary can be added to during other conversations at school. Asking questions that required parents or siblings to give details about an event strengthened the practices of listening for information and asking questions to gain information, both of which are skills needed to navigate the school curriculum successfully.

### **Bedtime routines**

We read as a family. Seven thirty is story time when we read with the kids for half an hour and then they can read in their beds from 8:00 to 8:15. Lights out is at 8:15. We read whatever the kids want. Every kid gets to pick a book and we read to them. Occasionally we will go in and lie on the bed (of the older kids) with them and listen to them as they read their own stories. (Interview, November 3, 2009)

Bedtime routines, similar to the one that Robin’s mother explained above, were frequent routines that emerged from the data. Each of the six families had special and

consistent ways to end the day creating unique literacy practices. Books were part of most of the students' night time ritual.

In Robin's example there were important literacy events and skills that took place during this evening bedtime routine. These included listening skills, comprehension, vocabulary building, and reading. The important practices included reading enjoyment, consistency, predictability, and comfort and security from sharing a story with her parents.

Marcos' routine focused on getting Marcos to go to bed. Mom said, "He fights me, so I lie down with him to get him to sleep before I go to work." She commented that they said their prayers that he will have a good day at school tomorrow (Interview, November 20, 2009). This practice showed the importance Marcos' mother placed on school and working to make it a good experience. She used bedtime to reinforce her values about school and school-type literacies.

Sonia's bedtime routines provided time for Mom and the two daughters to read and have a quiet time away from their father and brother. Mom explained,

"I try to put them to bed at 7 o'clock at night. We are upstairs reading while my husband and son are down stairs watching TV. I lie down with them, read them book and once in a while I let them watch their movie. They are just lying down watching the movie. And then they fall asleep." (Interview, December 16, 2009)

Spending this time together allows the girls to enjoy books and stories. Mom added that they liked the same books over and over, especially the funny ones. This routine allowed Sonia to make choices about what was read and to enjoy different genres of books, something she will experience in the library center at school.

These bedtime routines, which were important literacy events in the homes of the pre-kindergartners in this study, provided structure of following directions and routines, opportunities to interact with oral and written text, and vocabulary building conversations with family members (Heath, 1982; Gaylor, 2010). Heath (1982) argues that bedtime

stories are one of the most common literacy events in mainstream homes. She continues to say that when families participate in bedtime stories they are providing meaning making patterns that children will use repeatedly at home and school (Heath, 1982, p. 319). Through this routine with their families, these pre-kindergartners developed this type of meaning making skills such as print awareness, asking and answering questions, and valuing and enjoying a variety of genres of literature, which they can utilize in their classrooms.

Everyday practical literacies are the literacies that are developed while the family is getting things done. They are naturally occurring as part of the family's culture. The pre-kindergarten students developed multiple literacy skills as they participated in their everyday routines and chores. Bedtime, mealtime, and after school were only a few contexts that provided opportunities for literacy practices to develop. These at home practices form part of the foundation that the students will rely on to make meaning of their classroom experiences.

## **DIGITAL LITERACIES**

Robin is mad that she does not have her own email yet. She wants her own email account. I told her, "Well you have to learn to read and write first," and she quickly told me that she could. So, I told her that it was a rule that you had to be seven to have your own email. She would just have to use mine until then. (Interview, November 3, 2009)

Robin's request for an email account of her own is an example of the digital experiences and literacies that these six pre-kindergartners brought with them from home to the classroom. Technology was a part of each student's literacy story; the types of devices, number of different types of digital media available, and the amount of time that the students used them varied from home to home. Each home contained computers, cell phones, DVD players, and digital cameras. iPods and computer games such as Gameboy, DS, and Wii were present in the homes of Marcos, Robin, Israel, and Sonia.

Low tech devices such as games with electronic parts, books with sounds, and digitized educational games were also part of the students' environments. Technology surrounded these students.

Prensky (2001) reports that today's average college graduate over his/her lifetime has spent fewer than 5,000 hours reading, more than 10,000 hours playing video games and around 20,000 hours watching TV (p. 1). Prensky refers to these students as Digital Natives, students who have grown up learning to use technology in a natural way just as they learned to talk or walk. Access to the digital world, specifically access to the Internet has increased significantly. The Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) reports that access for children (8 to 18 year olds) has increased from a 47% in 1999 to 84% in 2009. Frost, Wortham, and Reifel (2008) note that very young children are growing up in an environment where media and technology is all around them. This is true for the six students in this study. For these students, technology is common practice.

Growing up with computers and technology has provided these students with tacit knowledge of how to use computers. Robin's mom made this clear in her interview.

Robin navigates on the computer with no problem. In fact, we have to listen from a distance so that we can hear if the music changes or stops. You know which music goes with PBS, so I know when she has navigated away from it. She just seemed to learn how from watching us. She loves reading her brother's blog and looking at the pictures he puts on there. (Interview, November 3, 2009)

Marcos' mother also commented that she did not know how he learned to use a computer; he just did. This natural use of the computer developed a practice of "no fear" when experimenting on the computer and trying new things. This practice can be built upon when the students get involved with new activities at school both digital and not digital. This is unlike some teachers and other adults. Prensky (2001) goes as far as to say that "the single biggest problem facing education today is that our Digital Immigrant

instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language” (p. 2).

Digital technology was evident in each of the homes in the study. Through analyzing the interviews and field notes centering on the students’ digital experiences and practices, several general common themes developed. These themes developed around how the digital literacy practices were used. The uses of digital technology included communication, entertainment, and interaction with the popular culture surrounding them.

### **Communication through digital technology**

Israel likes to text his grandmothers. He will ask me for the phone and tell me what he wants to say. He does this more than e-mail or even more than talking on the phone. He thinks it’s cool. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Israel has developed ways to communicate with family members who are not present. He has chosen texting over some other means. Communication skills and needs develop and grow as children begin to expand their world to include people and activities outside of their home. Grandparents lived far away in three of the families in the study, so there was a need for distance communication. The other three families had relatives close by who helped with childcare creating a need for easy communication. Computers, cell phones, DS games, and digital photographs provided the focal students with literacy practices that addressed this need for communication.

### ***Computers***

This digital environment has provided students with the practice of quick communication via computers using emails, blogs, and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. Robin and her family used email and blogs to keep in communication with their grandparents who live in Utah. Reading her brother’s blog and her mother’s blog was one of Robin’s favorite activities, according to her mother

(Interview, January 7, 2010). Mom also added that they sometimes used regular mail for cards and presents, but they usually depended upon email to keep updated. She shared that one grandfather just cannot get the hang of email and feels left out. “I tried to teach him, but he just doesn’t get it” (Interview, January 7, 2010).

Similarly, Sonia’s family used email to keep in touch with family on the East Coast and in the Philippines. “Sometimes we call on the phone, but we usually email and send pictures. That is the only way they get to see the kids,” commented Sonia’s Dad (Interview, December 16, 2009).

Israel and his brother even used their DS games to communicate. During her interview, Israel’s mother talked about Israel and his DS.

He likes it a lot. He is so funny. Last night I told him he had to stop so we could do homework. He says, “Well I can just pause it.” I was surprised that he knew how to do it. He thinks it is really neat. And they send messages to each other. They write things like, “Hi, Eduardo” and his brother can type back a message. They do that a lot. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Israel and his brother had discovered a new way of communication by trial and error. This method of learning is often used when interacting with computers and other digital technologies. This learning practice will support the discovery learning that is part of pre-kindergarten. When the students are presented with problems or challenges, their experiences with using computers to problem solving, trial and error, and building on each other’s discoveries can be utilized to find a solution.

### ***Cell phones***

Cell phones were common in every family. During each visit, every parent talked on their phone at least one time and many talked several times on the phone or sent and received text messages. During our visit to McDonald’s, Marcos would hear his Mom’s phone chime that a text message had arrived; he would take it, look at the message, and give it back. Sometimes he would ask what it said and other times he was satisfied with

just looking at the words. Israel also showed interest in his Mom's phone texts. His mother said that he preferred texting over email to talk to his grandparents and Dad when he was at work. The literacy understanding that written text has meaning can be strongly seen in the use of digital technology to communicate. Experiences with written text provides skills and practices that the students can build upon when they work with texts such as morning message and journal writing at school.

### ***Cameras and other digital devices***

Communication through pictures was also evident in the lives of the pre-kindergartners. Not only did they use cameras to record events, they used them as tools to interact with people and other digital devices. Jeffrey, although he could not use the digital camera, was very interested in seeing pictures and sharing them with others. On one field visit, Jeffrey gave me a special picture of himself and said that he wanted me to keep it forever. Marcos used pictures to interact with adults on several occasions during my visits. At McDonald's, he asked me to use my phone and take his picture on the playground. He also used digital photographs to add to games and change the characters to be real people in his life.

Sonia, Robin, and Israel took pictures by themselves when an important event took place. For example, Sonia and her sister recorded my second visit to their home using the digital camera. They said they were going to keep it and show their friends. They also took pictures of each other in their Halloween costumes. Both Sonia and Robin worked with scrapbooks to display their pictures. Wanting to share pictures and expand on them provides a practice that can be used in learning to tell and write stories later in their school and home lives.

Communicating between the students and their families using digital devices was a literacy practice in all the homes. Also, communicating with school was an evident



practice in the homes. The parents depended upon notes and emails from the school to keep them current on activities. Lily's mother posted notes from school on the wall to help her keep up with weekly activities. Robin's and Israel's mothers used email to share concerns and ask questions, while Jeffrey's mom shared ideas with the class via email and printed activities off the internet. Marcos' and Sonia's families used email to communicate with me about appointments and cancellations. Digital communication was imbedded into all the literacy practices in each of the homes in the study. Through the use of digital devices to communicate, the students have not only strengthen their technology skills but also have developed their communication practices in general. Understanding the concept of sharing information from one person to another in a variety of ways, whether digital or not, is an important skill. This practice will help the pre-kindergartners express their specific needs and share information from school to home and home to school. These communication skills will enable the students to successfully participate in multiple classroom literacy activities such as writing and delivering notes, posting to their class's webpage, and performing classroom jobs such as office or nurse runner.

### **Entertainment and digital technology**

The cushions were off the couch and on the floor next to it to make a large bed. The other chairs were up against the couch; the living room had been turned into a television theater. The girls were still in their pajamas watching cartoons on the television when I arrived. Lily's mom shared that last night (Friday) had been movie night, and they had stayed up late watching several movies. She continued to say that they really enjoyed watching movies together, and that they were also planning to go to a movie that day with some friends. (Field notes, November 14, 2009)

Entertainment was also a significant use of digital technology in the pre-kindergartners' homes. The vignette above is an example of Lily and her family's special movie night. Lily's family used DVDs and television shows for entertainment.

Televisions, DVD players and digital games were also used in the homes of the other students for entertainment. These digital devices bring different ideas and identities into the homes of the students (Gee, 2004; Pahl, 2002). The pre-kindergartners incorporate these ideas into their vocabulary, their play, and their meaning making both at home and at school. These practices become visible in their storytelling, conversations, and imaginary play (Gee, 2004). Engaging with DVDs, television, and digital games provided these learning opportunities for the pre-kindergartners.

### ***DVDs***

All the students had DVD players and televisions in their bedrooms and were quite adept at using them to watch their favorite movies. They also used the remote control to change channels and navigate between DVD and TV. When asked what were some of the activities that the parents and children liked doing together, television and DVDs were two of the main events mentioned.

Videos were used as rewards for Jeffrey for good behavior. On one visit, Jeffrey's mother had a rented video on the table for him when he came in from school. Sonia, Israel, and Marcos also liked videos and had several of their own which they could watch when they wanted. Robin watched some videos but not very often. Mom commented, "If Robin does watch videos it is either family videos or Disney...only G rated for her." (Interview, January 7, 2010).

Literacy skills and practices that are supported by movies and DVDs center on the viewing skills of the children, the genre of the movies, and their comprehension. Children begin to understand the distinct features of different genres of video representation as they do from reading. For example, most of the cartoon movies have a beginning, a problem, some action in the middle, and the conclusion. This can support their traditional comprehension and writing skill. Retelling stories is an important

literacy skill and can be seen when the students retell their favorite movie. Sonia was able to explain to me the movie “Merry Maids” during one of my visits. Her mother also commented that she knows all the Princess movies and can tell them to you. She also added that she loved Dora the Explorer and knew all the words in Spanish that they taught on the show. New vocabulary, in any language, is available in videos.

### ***Television***

Regular television programming was also used to entertain the students in the study. Sonia and Lily both watched cartoons as part of their daily routines at bedtime and after school. Marcos enjoyed Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, and Cartoon Network along with shows on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Sonia and Robin talked about Dora the Explorer and the Princess shows often in their play during field visits. Moses (2008) points out that television watching is a part of children’s practices. She noted that the 2001 Committee on Public Education reported that children on average spent three or more hours a day watching television programs and/or DVDs. Because of the high presence of television in the homes and the amount of time children spend on it, it is important to early childhood educators to acknowledge these literacy practices and plan to utilize them. By co-viewing movies and programs, parents and teachers can expand on these shows and highlight the positive portions. Parents and teachers can then expand the television literacies by connecting them to other literacies and events in their everyday life both at home and at school.

The television was also used to play games such as *Wii*. Israel and his brother played *Wii* and had a variety of games they could choose from. The technology provided the students opportunities to be independent and make choices as to what they would use to entertain themselves. These practices of independent choice making will also be used in the regular literacy activities in pre-kindergarten such as choosing books to read, topics

for narratives, and activities to extend their work when they complete their assigned work. Having practiced making their own choices and carrying them out will also help the pre-kindergartners' plan their learning during center time.

### ***Games***

Digital games such as Gameboy, Nintendo, DS, and Play Station 2 also were used by the students for entertainment. These games and other play technology are rapidly changing the way children play (Frost et al., 2008). Frost et al. (2008) point out that the combination of different media and technology creates a new way of engaging in play they refer to as synergy. This novel way of playing was seen in the play activities of Marcos and his father on two of the field visits. Their game playing was more complicated than that of the other students. In the following vignette, Marcos showed me how he could combine digital recorders and cameras with the games.

Marcos wanted to show me his DS game, but it would not come on. He went and found the charger and plugged it into the wall; the DS came on. He asked me if I liked *Yoshe* or *Pokémon*. Marcos continued to show me all of the games that he had. He went to another game that can be customized by recording your own sounds. He showed me how he and his parents had recorded sounds. The next game that played included the option to import pictures so that you can customize the faces of the characters in the game. Dad came over to the couch and showed him how to play a new game. He followed the commands on the screen that included "next" and "here." (Field notes, November 11, 2009)

This advanced gaming allowed Marcos to be creative and express himself in unique ways. Gee (2003) argues that when people play video games they take on identities just as they do when they are learning other new literacies. These identities can be manipulated and added to the game to help the player make meaning of the game. For example, Marcos learned to manipulate the game to his own ideas when he changed the pictures of the characters and added new sounds to the games. Learning to manipulate pictures, sounds, and text are part of writing and rewriting stories which will be encouraged in his pre-kindergarten classroom.

Learning to play video games includes literacy practices that are also used in school. Gee (2004) points out that video games offer opportunities to scaffold learning both through face to face interactions and interactions with digital literacies. Marcos and his father engaged in scaffolded learning when they played and customized their video games. Following directions from other adults like Marcos did when his Dad showed him a new game is parallel to following a teacher's directions for activities. Participating in scaffolding, following directions, interacting with characters, and developing storylines are practices used in digital gaming which can be seen in pre-kindergarten classes through such as instances as students interacting with storybooks and creating new stories and characters. Understanding the literacy practices involved in gaming can provide information to help educators bring their students' digital literacies into the classrooms and adding another home to school connection.

### **Digital technology and the resulting Pop Culture**

Visiting Lily's room, I noticed that everything was very neat and had a special place. The television and DVD player was on one wall across from their beds. It was the focal point of the room. Lily and her sister wanted me to see their closet. They showed me their Dora shoes and their Hello Kitty shoes. They each had a backpack one was a Princess motif and the other was a Dora. Lily also had a Dora purse with some change in it. I asked her what she would buy with her money. She said, "Something Princess." (Field notes, October 22, 2009)

The influence of pop culture was not limited to just Lily. Fascination with characters from media, both television and movies, was a common thread in all the literacy stories. Each girl had something that was "Princess"—a toy, a game, a book, or a piece of clothing. The boys had super heroes and "Car" pictures on their clothes and in their room. Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella (2003), in their research with children zero to six find that 97% of the children "have clothes, toys and the like based on characters from television and movies." This pop culture influence is a part of who the pre-kindergartners are and their literacy practices. Dyson (2003) points out that

children's experiences with popular media is an integral part of today's childhood. Through the various digital technology including television, movies, educational DVDs, games, and digitally enhanced books the children were exposed to pop culture and incorporated those elements into their literacy practices.

Examples of the pre-kindergartners' interactions with pop culture media were part of each literacy story. Jeffrey, in his play with toy cars, imitates the story line of the movie *Cars*. He can spell all of the main characters' names and can describe them in great detail. He can also tell you the dialogue from the movie that each character has. Sonia incorporated Princess into her Halloween celebrations. All three girls had Barbie dolls and played with them regularly. Dora the Explorer and Hannah Montana were also popular characters found on the students clothes and backpacks.

Israel included super heroes in his interactive play. Israel's mother noted that he had given all his action figures super hero names. He pretended one was Batman and one was Superman. His dramatic play involved the super heroes coming to the rescue of people and whole cities. Marcos had Street Fighters and Sponge Bob on his clothes and talked about the different characters from video games. He said that his Dad had taught him all about the games and their characters.

Capitalizing on the students' interest and prior knowledge acquired through their interaction with popular culture can provide opportunities for teachers to relate home activities to school activities. Dyson, in her article "Welcome to the Jam: Popular Culture, School Literacy, and the Making of Childhoods," clearly points out that children use pop culture to make sense of and begin to participate in school literacies. She adds that it is important to look at this process as natural not as "an external threat" (p. 328). Incorporating popular culture by adding books and pictures that reflect the students'

interests would capitalize on this natural process and make a connection from their home to school.

Technology is everywhere in the homes of the pre-kindergartners (Rideout et al., 2003; Lankshear & Noble, 2003). Availability to computers, television, DVD movies, internet and smart phones has increased over the past ten years. Pre-kindergartners' interaction with the various digital devices discussed provided home literacy events and practices that fostered skills that are found in the current pre-kindergarten curriculum. They learned to follow directions (verbal and written), use context clues to figure out words on the screens, use different symbol systems, turn taking, imitate others, and sequence events and actions. The students also developed and strengthened literacy practices such as attending, working with cause and effect, turn taking, trying new things, and retelling stories, songs, and shows. Digital technology literacies that pre-kindergarten students bring with them to the classroom can be harnessed to provide motivation and background to future literacy learning.

### **SCHOOL TYPE LITERACIES**

We are optimistic that Robin will be reading by the end of the year. I think it is definitely a possibility because we have all the beginning reader books that we read with our other kids. She and I are working with those books. She is already beginning to read things like "I see...." I think she will be reading before long. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

School-type literacies have been noted in all of the above themes such as reading the directions on a game in the relationship literacies, sending a message using a DS in the digital literacies or making a list in the everyday routine literacies. These school-type literacies were a part of the practices that occurred in the daily activities of the families. Direct opportunities for the pre-kindergartners to learn school-type literacies such as learning the alphabet and reading stories were incorporated into the homes of all six

families. In the vignette above, Robin's mother talked about how they worked on reading using easy books that her older children had used to learn to read. Marcos' mother said that she read to him every day and worked on his letters. She also included talking about letters and words while they played their games (Interview, November 20, 2009). Similarly, Sonia's Dad credited his wife for being the one helping her to learn to read. He said, "She works with the girls on their letters and sounds a whole lot" (Interview, December 16, 2009).

These specific activities and practices that focus on reading and writing have been considered important for parents and children to participate in schools for many years. Easily identifiable and directly related to classroom activities, emphasis has been put on these literacy events and practices. Some researchers have stated that students from LSES homes are lacking in these types of activities, thus creating a deficit form of thinking (Cairney & Ruge, 1999; March, 2003; Snow et al., 1998; Adams, 1990) which they feel needs to be corrected for the students to be successful. Home intervention programs have been created to help parents make their homes look more like school (Carrington and Luke, 2003). Many of these programs have been seen as successful in providing children with school-type literacy activities at home (Carrington and Luke, 2003).

Conversely, these school-type literacy events and practices were included in the literacy practices of the six families in this study. The variety, methods, and time spent varied among the families, but the focus on learning to read and write was consistent. Each family directly worked on reading skills using a variety of activities and materials. In analyzing the data from the interviews and field visits it was interesting to note that three main focus points concerning school-type literacies emerged. These literacy



activities seemed to be grounded in storybook reading, providing opportunities and materials for their students, and direct teaching by family members.

### **Storybook reading**

Right before we go to bed, I read them books. We will sometimes talk about the book, other times they just want to listen. They don't want to talk about the story. Sometimes they want me to repeat the book and sometimes they don't...Lily just loves her books. (Interview, January 13, 2010)

Storybook reading, the act of an adult or older child sharing a book with a child, has been lauded as the most important activity a family can do to insure literacy for their children (Neuman, 1996; Bus et.al, 1995; Pelligrini, 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). Adams (1990) pointed out that there was a big discrepancy between the number of hours LSES families spent in storybook reading versus MSES and HSES families. She proposed this difference as a cause of lower reading ability of school age children from LSES families. However, the families in this study all participated in storybook reading, with five of them reporting daily storybook reading. More current research on the amount of time LSES families spend in storybook reading was not available. The importance of reading with your child has been absorbed into these pre-kindergarteners' home literacy practices. This was shown when the parents spoke about what the teachers had shared with them about literacy. They all reported that the teacher wants them to read to their child daily and that they were doing so; however, storybook reading had been incorporated on differing levels. For example, Robin's mother talked of how important reading was to her and all her children. She said, "We read with the kids for half an hour every night. We read as a family" (Interview, January 7, 2010). She went on to say that she loved to read and took every occasion to listen to all the children read. She said, "Occasionally we will go in and lay on the bed with the older kids and listen to

them read as they read their own stories. They read during homework time, too. We listen to them then” (Interview, January 7, 2010).

On the other hand, Marcos’ mother did not find story time as rewarding. She shared her feelings of frustration saying, “Marcos pays more attention at school and they can teach him more. When I read to him he is not into it. We do it and turn in the reading logs” (Interview, November 20, 2009). Marcos’ mother included story time in their routines even though she was not sure Marcos was getting much out of it. She did so because “it is important” (Interview, November 20, 2009).

Jeffrey had very structured storybook reading experiences. His mother explained how she read to the children:

They get read to every night. It is part of the routine and we keep it very consistent. Sometimes I stand up in front of both of their beds. Both of their beds face the front of the room, so I can stand there and show the pictures. But, they always want me to come to sit down in the middle of their beds. When we read in the living room, each one of them sits on each side. They like to see the pictures and they like to look at you while you are speaking. (Interview, November 3, 2010)

The emphasis during Jeffrey’s reading time was on the books. It was important to Jeffrey and his sister that they be able to see the book and see who was reading. This mirrors what story time often looks like in pre-kindergarten classrooms creating a familiar setting for Jeffrey to learn in.

Although the experiences with storybook reading varied across the data collected from all six families, it was mentioned or observed in every home. Each family commented on turning in the Daily Reading Log to their child’s teacher. Teachers use these logs to encourage the families to read at home daily. The families record the names of the books and when the log is completely filled in they return it to school. The students would receive rewards such as stickers or pizza coupons when they complete the log and returned it to school. In this study, Jeffrey’s and Robin’s mothers said that they

were read to as children and that is why they read to their own children. Lily's mother, Israel's mother, and Sonia's mother shared as their reason for reading to their children that they were avid readers themselves. Marcos' mother said, "I read to him because I know it is important" (Interview, November 20, 2009). Regardless of the reasons or amount of time spent reading, storybook reading was a literacy practice in each family. This practice will be repeated in pre-kindergarten throughout the day including during circle time, story time, and playing in the library center.

### **Opportunities and materials for school-type literacies**

Lily's mother shared that she had gone Christmas shopping the day before because she wanted to buy the girls some new learning toys. She also added that she did not like the ones they have. She wanted "to buy them toys that would help them learn things." (Field notes, November 14, 2009)

Providing learning toys and materials for their children was a part of the literacy practices in all six of the families in the study. Each home had at least one computer, computer-type games, digital games, board games, writing materials, books, and television DVD players. In fact, each student had their own TV/DVD player in their room. Buckingham and Scanion (2001) reported, in their study of educational magazines, that "parents are increasingly being urged to 'invest' in their children's education by providing additional educational resources at home" (p. 282). They went on to note that home computers were specifically being marketed to families to help their children get ahead along with "more broadly 'educative' material, such as CD-ROMs and illustrated information books" (p. 282). National organizations such as Reading is Fundamental (RIF) and the National Writing Project (NWP) encourage parents to provide activities and materials at home. Furthermore, the National Writing Project teachers stress that early literacy skills, which link reading and writing, develop first at home

through interactions with parents, grandparents, and caregivers long before a child enters a classroom (NWP, 2008).

The families in this study were very in tune with providing resources for their children. This was evidenced by looking around their homes. The data from observations during field visits and the parent interviews pointed to three basic areas that parents strived to provide materials and opportunities for their children. They were computers and books, writing and drawing materials, and school-type materials such as workbooks and flash cards. These materials were used for entertainment as well were available to help the students learn typical school-type literacies such as letters, sounds, sight words, and conventions of print.

### ***Computers and books***

Computers and books have been noted in previous discussions along with games including both digital and traditional games. They were used for entertainment, but they were also seen by the families as important tools for learning school-type literacies. It was important to the families to have access to these materials. Robin's mother expressed this during her interview. She said,

Robin likes to play bowling on the *Wii*. We just have *Wii* sports and the music one where they play the guitar. We are pretty odd parents. We don't let our kids play anything unless it is educational. We monitor the computer and television to make sure they are age appropriate for Robin. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Books were visible in all of the kindergarteners' homes. Parents bought books from the school book clubs, Wal-Mart, and bookstores. Four of the families also were frequent visitors to the public library. Jeffrey's family visited the library approximately two times a week. His mother had incorporated the library into the family literacy practices crediting her own babysitters as the ones who introduced her to the library. She shared the following:

In the summer I would stay with a family that my parents knew. We would make like one trip a week to the library and we spent a couple of hours in the library. And if it were not for someone showing me that, I would probably never thought to take my kids to the library. We would take a bag and check out 20 books. Sometimes we would just sit there and read them during summers. If it had not been for that family, I would not have thought about taking my kids to the library. (Interview, December 16, 2009)

Jeffrey's mom had incorporated her sitter's literacy practices into her own life and in turn shared that with her children.

The number of books and educational materials in the home has been connected to future reading and writing achievement. Neuman & Celano (2001) report that low SES families have fewer books in their homes than MSES or HSES homes. Limited financial resources for LSES families is given as one reason for the low number of books. The number of books in the homes of the six pre-kindergarteners in this study varied from around 20 in Marcos' and Sonia's homes to book shelves full at Israel's, Robin's and Jeffrey's homes. Each family had its own unique way of providing books and other resources. Lily's mother went to garage sales to add things to the girls' room and her computer was a gift to the family. Israel's mother talked about using the school library books that her older son brought home to provide new books for him. Robin and Sonia also had older siblings with whom to share books and materials. Marcos' mother talked about the books that she got by attending Reading Night at the school.

The importance of providing books for their children led the families to utilize community resources in creative ways. Jeffrey's mother shared that she felt it was very important to "learn about resources from the library, church and things that are free." She added, "Using the library will last them more throughout their life than just going to a bookstore and buying books" (Interview, December 16, 2009). The importance of books in the home is well documented in the literature (Dickenson & Tabor, 2001; Calabrese, 2002, Weigel, et al., 2006, Webster & Feiler, 1998). Parents in this study used

various means to provide books for their children making books an integral part of the home environment. This provided evidence to the importance and value that their families placed on reading. The practice of valuing reading and books will be taken with the students to their pre-kindergarten classroom.

### ***Writing and drawing materials***

“They like to draw—her and her sister—they draw a lot.” This was evidenced in the amount of time that Sonia and her sister worked with paper, crayons, pens, pencils, markers, and chalk during the research visits. An easel was in one corner of the room. Under the easel was a basket that had scraps of paper, chalk, markers, scissors, and a glue stick. These were available for the girls to use whenever they wanted to. There was also a drawer in the buffet in the dining room where Mom kept her papers and pencils. Sonia and her sister would go to the drawer when they were not satisfied with the choices in the basket. (Field notes, October 7, 2009)

Providing opportunities for pre-kindergarteners to practice writing and drawing is important to future learning (NWP, 2010). Sonia has easy access to writing and drawing materials in her home. Her mother realized Sonia’s interest in putting thoughts and ideas on paper and provided a variety of materials to encourage her. The National Writing Project points out that early literacy skills which link reading and writing develop first at home through interactions with parents, grandparents, and caregivers long before a child enters a classroom” (NWP, 2010). The families in the study insured the occurrence of these important writing events by providing the necessary materials.

Sonia and Jeffrey both had a white board easel in their family room. Jeffrey’s mother commented during one field visit that his grandmother had given it to them for his birthday. She added, “We usually give them ideas for gifts that are educational” (Interview, November 3, 2009). In providing grandparents and family members with educational gift ideas, she was able to add more materials encouraging literacy to the home.

Marcos and Israel both had spiral notebooks that they used for journals. Marcos' mother says that she kept a journal and Marcos wanted to also. Israel's mother encouraged her sons to express themselves in their journals especially when they were upset. She explained,

When the boys are upset about something, I will say "just write about it; just write down what you are feeling" and they do. Eduardo calls it his journal and will write in it. With Israel, he draws more. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Robin's favorite materials were colors and coloring books. Her mother commented,

That girl can really color. She likes to give her pictures to people. She will write letters on the top like "MNOPTT" and sign her name at the bottom. She will bring it to me and say it says, "To Grandma" and ask me to mail it." (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Robin's use of writing in meaningful, real world ways developed literacy practices that continue into school.

Opportunities for the students to experiment with writing were part of the pre-kindergarteners' home literacy practices. These practices helped them develop the fine motor skills for writing and print concepts. It also provided ways of expressing their thoughts and ideas through the use of writing and drawing. Genish and Dyson (2009) argue that young children "all use their diverse experiential resources" to use the tool of writing (p. 87). The students' writing and drawing experiences will carry over to writing experiences in pre-kindergarten making journal writing and morning message activities familiar giving them confidence as well as past experiences to build on.

### **Direct teaching of reading and writing skills**

Marcos took a couple of cookies and then kept looking through the bag. He pulled out the books and put them aside. He found the mail and looked at the Highlights magazine. Mom and Marcos began to work with the magazine. Mom turned to a puzzle page. She showed him how to match the shape of the stickers to the shaded areas on the page. She watched carefully asking questions and

pointing out specifics related to the shapes. At one point, she tore off a piece that was interfering with Marcos getting to the stickers making it easier for him to work. She waited until he was finished to tell him that there was one that was wrong. Marcos searched the page, but could not find his error. His mother directed him to the area and he quickly fixed his mistake. She then asked him to write his name in the spiral notebook, helping him verbally. He wrote MAMAMAMA. Marcos then picked up a book and he and his mother began to look through it and identify pictures. (Field notes, October 23, 2009)

Marcos and his mother were engaged in a direct teaching activity where she helped him learn about shapes through the literacy acts of reading and writing. This was one example of how the parents worked directly on school-type literacies.

Previous studies, such as Adams (1990) and Haney and Hill (2004), did not find many school-type literacies in the homes of their research participants. In fact, Haney and Hill point to the lack of typical school-type reading and writing activities in the LSES homes as a literacy issue that needs to be addressed. They stress the importance of providing instruction to parents so that they will know how to directly teach their students literacy skills at home. Many agencies and schools have developed programs to teach parents how to work with their children.

The parents in this study have incorporated the direct teaching of literacy skills into their literacy practices. The data collected from the home visits and interviews of the six pre-kindergarten students showed that these activities were a part of the daily lives of all six pre-kindergarteners. The importance of conventional literacy such as writing their names, learning their letters and sounds, and reading storybooks were a part of their home culture.

These school-type literacies have entered the homes and home literacy practices through multiple avenues. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, in their book *Growing Up Literate* (1988), noted that school literacies entered the home through the finished work that the students brought home and the homework that the teacher assigned. This was true for the focal students in this study. Homework that was meant for older siblings is also



incorporated into the school literacies of the pre-kindergarteners. For example, Israel and his brother work side by side during homework time. Although Israel does not have any homework, he participates in his brother's work and asks his mother for more "homework." Similar stories were told by Sonia and Robin's mothers.

School-type literacies also entered the home through the public media. These literacies entered not only through television shows such as Sesame Street and Reading Rainbow, but through public service announcements (PSAs) in the media. Reading is Fundamental (RIF), an organization that promotes the importance of reading through distribution of free books, began its PSAs 40 years ago. The parents of these students have grown up with the importance of school-type literacies being impressed upon the public.

Another avenue for school literacies into the home is the individual family culture. The importance of becoming literate, in the traditional definition, is a part of everyday life. Sonia's father, having retired from the military, is working on his college degree. Lily's mother wants to go back to school to increase her nursing certifications. Jeffrey and Robin both have parents who have college degrees. Israel's mother and Marcos' mother both have high school diplomas and work at jobs that are encouraging them to go back to school. Their jobs provide continual training that requires high literacy skills. These experiences of family members naturally bring reading and writing practices into the homes. When analyzing the data from all six families in order to identify specific direct teaching activities and their contexts three themes emerged. They included homework, paper and pencil activities, and drill activities.

They do their homework after school. Israel always asks for more work than he brings home. I think it is because his brother, my first grader, has a lot more and it involves a lot. Israel works on things like practicing his letters. Recently, he wrote a letter to Santa. I do have them write and draw a lot. Like, if they are upset, I will say just write down what you are feeling. Israel writes, but Eduardo, he kind of just draws more. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Homework was an example of how reading and writing were specifically included in the families' home literacies. Israel's mother's account of homework time above was very typical of homework sessions across the students.

When talking about homework and projects from school Marcos' mother talked about a Thanksgiving book project. She explained,

He brought home a project for a book. It was a book to make about being thankful. He colored it and added drew a picture. He drew Mr. Hedge Hog, one of his favorite characters. It seemed to be appropriate work for him to do. (Interview, November 20, 2009)

Lily's mother shared some of her concerns about the homework and work that Lily brought home. She said,

I think the work is okay. The only thing that bothers me is about homework. When she does get it, I don't know if it is homework or what. I should have a little note on it saying please have this work turned in by this time. You don't know which papers are homework and which ones are not. So, you don't know if you are supposed to do it as a project or if you are supposed to just do an activity at home if you want to. (Interview, January 13, 2010)

Lily's mother's concern about correctly doing the homework showed the value she placed on school-type work. She wanted to be sure that she understood what was to be done for school and what were merely suggestions.

Sonia's, Robin's, and Jeffrey's mothers also expressed the fact that they thought the homework, which usually were family projects, was appropriate and gave them opportunities to work together on school-type work. Sonia's father was extremely proud of the fact that his older son had helped Sonia with her last project. He commented, "It really was a family project. It was fun" (Interview, December 16, 2009).

Parents used the completed work that the children brought home to give them ideas about other school-type activities they could do. Robin and Israel have their homework time supplemented with ideas from their work done at school and their siblings' work. Robin's mother reported that Robin will usually color, practice writing

her name, or do things like shape identifications during their family homework time. These activities were a direct match to the types of completed work that she shared in the interview.

“Robin brings home lots of paintings. Lots of painting. Today she brought home two different turkeys. One was her hand and one was painted. She brings home her ABCs. Like if she wrote words like they practiced vehicle words was the most recent one. They practice colors and shapes. (Interview, January 7, 2010)

Robin’s mother went on to say that she felt the work and homework that Ms. C provided was very appropriate. Robin’s family participated in similar activities at home and used homework as family time and a skill reinforcement opportunity.

Homework provided an opportunity for the students to share what they had learned at school with their families as well as an opportunity for parents to see specific skills that were being worked on at school. The practice of doing homework brought school-type literacies into the home and gave parents information and practice opportunities.

### ***Paper and pencil activities***

School-type activities were often work that could be done with paper and pencil, colors, or markers. These type activities reflected the type of work that is often seen in classrooms of all ages. Workbooks and worksheets are often seen as ways for parents to work on specific skills with their students. Haney & Hill (2005), in their study of emergent literacy and direct instruction, found that parents chose activities similar to their own experiences. The familiarity of worksheets provides a vehicle for the parents to intentionally teach school-type literacies such as letters and sounds. Patton (1993) also argues that parents want their children to have worksheets at home and at school to provide information about what they are doing and how well they are doing it.

Worksheets that proclaim to meet the children's needs in developing specific reading skills are readily available (Clyde & Condon, 2005). The web offers families multiple sources to simply download these types of pages. Other paper and pencil materials such as workbooks are available to parents in stores such as The Dollar Tree and Wal-Mart making the resources accessible and affordable.

In Jeffrey's room, there were worksheets that he had completed hanging on his wall (Field notes, October 7, 2009). His mother, in her interview (November 3, 2009), talked about completing these kind of worksheets either at church or at home. She also said, "We do our Sunday school projects together and we also have workbooks that we bought from Mardel, a home school provider. We do those occasionally. Sometimes Jeffrey will ask to do the workbooks, but I mostly do those with his sister" (Interview, November 3, 2009). Robin's mother also referred to church papers as activities that they did at home (Interview, January 7, 2010). Five of the families mentioned that their children did the worksheets when they went to restaurants. Lily's mother said, "You know they come around and give the girls colors and papers. We do those together" (Interview, January 13, 2010). Ms. M also shared that Jeffrey's mother would send her worksheets that she had downloaded from the internet to share with the pre-kindergarten class.

Writing their letters and their name was a common activity for the families. Marcos practiced writing his name during our first visit showing me how his mother has been teaching him to write it (Field notes, October 23, 2009). Lily's mother said the following about her learning to write her name:

I am working with her with that. She writes it pretty okay except for the 2 Ls. She connects the two Ls together so they look like a four. And I am trying to get her to learn to separate those. She is doing ok with writing. (Interview, January 13, 2010)

As mentioned earlier, writing their name was included in Israel's and Robin's homework. Sonia practiced writing her name with her mother as well. Jeffrey learned to write his name and his other family members' names on his easel. One such example of his name writing can be seen in the following vignette:

Jeffrey's mother tells him to go and write his name on the white board. He runs to the board and begins to write. Mom interrupts and explains that the next letter should be a lowercase e. Jeffrey balks and says he does not know how. Mom continues to prompt Jeffrey and assures him that he can do it correctly. After several attempts at encouraging Jeffrey to make the lower case e, his stepfather suggests that his mother show him one more time. Jeffrey then made his own e. His mother rewarded him with praise and a stamp on his hand. He then goes on and writes his sister's name, Mom and Dad. (Field notes, October 7, 2009)

This event showed the importance that Jeffrey's family placed on learning to correctly write his name. This was typical of the importance that the families placed on being able to successfully master the school-type literacies. This importance was evidenced in the activities that were practiced daily such as recognizing letters, numbers, and sight words.

### ***Drill activities***

Practicing the school-type literacy skills that parents viewed as important was seen in many of the homes. Either from their own experiences, their other children's experiences or suggestions from the teachers, certain skills were practiced at home. For example, Lily's mother worked with her on learning her alphabet after she had attended a parent conference. She explained,

At my teacher conference, Ms. C. said that Lily needed to work on her letters. "I want to see if she can learn this way." Lily's mother used flash cards during the girls' snack time which her boyfriend had bought at Wal-Mart. At each place there was a plate with a graham cracker, a few spoonfuls of peanut butter, and a few slices of apple. She put three cards in front of each girl. There was a letter on one side and a picture that started with the letter on the other side. She had A, B, C in front of Lily. As Lily ate, Mom asked what the letter was and what sound it made. Mom went over the three cards several times before putting them away. (Field notes, October 22, 2009)

Lily's mother explained that she wanted to work with the girls at snack time because she was working at night. She has found ways to support the school-literacy skills that Lily needed. She expressed why she felt that it was important when she said,

It seems like Lily needs to work on her writing and her reading. I keep getting little notes to that effect. I got her progress report and after her report card they just sent this letter report home. I don't know how advanced the other kids are with reading, but I feel like Lily is just a little behind. (Field notes, October 22, 2009).

Flash cards and drill activities were one way that she felt she could help Lily learn.

Other drill type activities were seen in the homes of Sonia and Robin. Their mothers worked with them on letters and letter sounds as well as sight words. Robin's mother said that she was working on the sounds and blending that Ms. C sent home. She also added that she did not feel that she worked on them enough (Interview, January 7, 2010).

Jeffrey's and Marcos' mothers included their drill practice of letters and sounds into other family activities. They both continually asked what letter this was or made the sound for the letter as they read, played games, or practiced writing. For example, while playing Sponge Bob - Operation, Marcos' mom would show him the card and ask him what letter it was or make a sound, Marcos would repeat it, and she would identify it (Field notes, October 11, 2009). Israel practiced his skills during homework and also for a few minutes when he stayed with his grandmother immediately after school. During this time, his grandmother took out his folder from his backpack and looked to see if there were any papers in it. On one field visit, there was a book. She worked with Israel, asking him the letters and sight words as they looked at the book together. She also pointed out letters and sounds on the papers at her desk (Field visit, January 5, 2010).

Although varying in the ways that the parents implemented drill and practice activities, they were a part of each of the families' literacy practices. The parents, either through their past experiences or information from the teachers, decided what their child needed to practice on and incorporated that into their day. Some used traditional practice methods such as flashcards and repetition. Others zeroed in on specific skills and stressed them at every opportunity during other activities.

The presence of school-type literacy practices were part of each of the pre-kindergarteners' home literacies. Families engaged in these types of activities to help prepare their students for pre-kindergarten. Working on these skills with their children reflected the emphasis that is placed on learning to read and write in the media, by teachers, and schools. It also mirrors the way many schools are approaching reading and writing instruction (Fields et al., 2008). Parents in this study worked at providing school-type activities motivated by their desire to provide their children with literacy skills that to help their children be successful at school and the future.

## **CONCLUSION**

Children develop multiple literacy practices through participating in everyday activities in their home (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2008). All the home literacies discussed in this chapter were embedded in the lives of the children and families. Auerbach (1989) argues that the literacies learned in the social context of the home provide a framework for literacy success. Auerbach (1989) also adds that the literacies practices from home must be valued outside the home and used to guide teachers in creating meaningful experiences at school.

The many literacy experiences identified and discussed are important practices that the pre-kindergarteners developed at home. Just as real as the physical objects such as the crayons, scissors, and lunches in their backpacks, the students take these literacy

practices and knowledge with them to their classrooms. And, just as the other contents in their backpacks, these practices should be brought out and used to provide successful experiences for all the students. The task of making sure that these literacies are acknowledged, valued, and built upon is the task of both parents and early childhood educators (Marsh, 2003). The purpose of this study is to offer information to help this occur.

The information from this study was developed from many hours spent with the students, families, and teachers in this study. The time spent with these six focal pre-kindergarten students and their families provided a plethora of home literacy events and practices. In this chapter, I have discussed many of these events, describing what they looked like and how they were integrated into the lives of the students. The connection between the home literacies and the school literacies were also pointed out to help clarify the opportunities for bridges from home to school for these literacies (see appendix for a listing of these relationships). The broad themes—relationship literacies, routines, digital media, and typical school-type literacy activities—provided a way to look at the common activities across these cases. This data provided some insight into the first research question of this study: What literacy practices do these pre-kindergarteners experience with their families? Although, many practices were identified, it is still only a portion of all the literacy events and practices that take place daily in each of the student's homes. More research would undoubtedly identify many more.

Chapter 5 will address research questions two and three which are the “so what” of identifying their home literacy practices. In the next chapter, I will examine the two teachers' views on literacy in general and literacy in their classrooms. Also, the teachers' insight into their individual student's literacy practices will be shared. Lastly, how the



teachers view these literacy practices fitting into their existing scheme of literacy and how they see it impacting their planning of instruction will be discussed.

## **Chapter 5: Teachers' Literacy Practices**

In the previous chapter, the home literacies of the six pre-kindergarteners in this study were examined. This identification of the literacies addressed the study's first research question. Chapter 5 addresses research questions two and three which specifically examined the pre-kindergarten teachers' constructs of literacy and their interactions with the literacy stories of their students. After a brief description of each of the teachers, I will discuss their views on literacy and literacy instruction that they shared during the first interviews. Lastly, I will discuss the teachers' knowledge of their students, their responses to their students' literacy stories and the implications the teachers drew from the literacy stories.

### **THE TEACHERS**

#### **Ms. C**

Ms. C is a fourth year teacher who has worked in Seam her entire career. She began as the Seam ISD collaborative teacher at the off-site Head Start Center where she taught half the day in four different Head Start classrooms. The remainder of her time was spent at the Seam Early Childhood campus collaborating with five pre-kindergarten classes. During her first year of teaching, she attended CIRCLE (Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning Education) training with the Head Start teachers as well as scheduled school district trainings. CIRCLE is training developed and provided by The University of Texas Health Science Center's Children's Learning Institute (CLI). CIRCLE training focuses on providing teachers professional staff development in order to "provide pre-kindergarten teachers with greater content knowledge and best practice teaching activities" (CIRCLE, 2010). Sponsored by the

Texas Education Agency (TEA), CIRCLE works with Head Start programs, child care providers, and public schools to forge collaborations to better serve young children.

Ms. C attended a Texas public high school and was among those who had to pass the TAKS test to graduate. She then attended a local state university where she graduated with a B.S. in Human Development and Family Sciences. Her degree provided a background in child development and experience working with young children. She had also worked at a child care facility the summer before her first year. However, she did not have a Texas teaching certificate, and she went through an alternative certification program to gain her certification. During this initial year at Seam, she worked through course work and was mentored by a professional from the alternative certification program. She received her provisional teaching certificate at the end of her first school year of teaching. Ms. C was also mentored by a veteran teacher on the Early Childhood Campus as part of the Seam ISD induction year support program.

At the end of Ms. C's first year, the inclusion pre-kindergarten classroom teacher moved, and the position became available. The classroom provided inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities, who comprised about 30% of the classroom. One difference in the inclusion classroom and the other pre-kindergartens was the presence of a special education paraprofessional to help with all the students. Ms. C was very interested in working with special education students and applied to take over this class. She obtained her special education certification and moved into that position, where she has remained. She is also ESL (English as a Second Language) certified by the Texas State Board of Education.

She has actively participated in the culture of the school by serving on committees and projects. She has attended multiple in-service trainings both locally and state-wide focusing on meeting student's needs, teaching math, and using technology. Ms. C is

participating in the School Readiness Collaborative (SRC), a grant which provides CIRCLE Training, in-class coaches, and monthly on-site professional development trainings. She recently began working on a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction. She sees herself as a "life-long learner".

### **Ms. M**

Ms. M is a second year teacher in Seam ISD. She graduated from a traditional teacher education program at a state university with a B.S. in Applied Science. After graduation she worked in a pre-kindergarten summer school program before moving to Seam and accepting the pre-kindergarten job. Ms. C served as Ms. M's mentor during her first year of teaching. She has been involved in several local trainings which focused on math, science, and technology. This year Ms. M has participated in the SRC grant along with Ms. C and the other pre-kindergarten teachers at the school. This is her first time to go through CIRCLE training. Part of the SRC grant includes applying for the Texas School Ready!™ (TSR) certification which is administered by the Texas State Center for Early Childhood Development (TSC) at the Children's Learning Institute (CLI). Texas School Ready! is a program that certifies preschool education classrooms that "effectively prepared their students for kindergarten" (CIRCLE, 2010). CIRCLE states that quality instructional practices must be in place in a preschool program to get children ready for kindergarten. Readiness is based on "the children actually achieving scores showing they were on track in the areas of reading and social skills when they went to kindergarten" (CIRCLE, 2010). It is a two year process that includes data from teachers, classrooms, and the students. The student data is collected during their pre-k year and again during their kindergarten year.

Ms. M is active in the school serving on several committees and working with parents in projects such as the Fall Festival and Reading Night. Although considering

herself a novice teacher, she sees herself as “understanding kids and being an effective teacher” (Interview 1).

#### **TEACHERS AND THEIR LITERACY SCHEME**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Associations (IRA) in their joint position paper, *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children on Learning to Read and Write* (1998) recognize the importance of teachers and their views on literacy in creating environments where all students can learn. The statement points out that there is “no one teaching method or approach that is likely to be the most effective for all children” (Strickland, 1994). Instead, they state:

Rather, good teachers bring into play a variety of teaching strategies that can encompass the great diversity of children in schools. Excellent instruction builds on what children already know, and can do, and provides knowledge, skills, and dispositions for lifelong learning.

The literacy views and instructional practices detailed in Ms. C’s and Ms. M’s interviews reflect this statement. They discussed how they used a variety of resources, instructional methods, and instructional arrangements to help their students develop literacy skills. Although both Ms. C and Ms. M expressed a developmentally appropriate approach to learning in general, much of their discussions that focused specifically on literacy development described a more direct, scripted approach focusing on skills rather than a broader definition of literacy. Their views and practices were continually being molded and developed by their interaction with the school mandates, their own experiences, the curriculum and staff development being provided by the SRC grant.

Durkin and Smith (2005), in *Beginning Literacy with Language* (Dickinson & Tabors, 2005) noted that to understand literacy in the classroom, researchers must look at teachers’ views and beliefs, teachers’ classroom practices, and their interactions with the

students. In this next section, I will examine Ms. C's and Ms. M's overall literacy views. I will share data from their interviews that speak to their definitions of literacy, their beliefs about literacy, and how these developed.

### **Overall views on literacy**

Teachers' overall views and values about literacy are evidenced in not only what they say about literacy, but in how they incorporate literacy into their classrooms. Lynch (2009), in her study on preschool teachers' beliefs about print literacy, notes that "to understand preschool teachers' practice, it is important to examine their beliefs about that practice" (p. 191). By examining the teachers' beliefs about literacy and literacy development, a better understanding of their views and how they developed these views on literacy was evident. From this examination of the data provided by the teachers in their first interviews, several important factors about the teachers' beliefs and views on literacy emerged. First, I examine the working definitions of literacy established by the teachers. Second, the value that the teachers placed on literacy and specific literacy skills and practices are discussed. Finally, the ways in which these literacy views were developed are explained.

### ***Definition of literacy***

Definitions of literacy are varied and range from simply acquiring skills and sets of rules to a more NLS concept that literacies are socially situated practices and events where reading and writing are only elements of a much bigger picture (Lynch, 2009). Ms. C and Ms. M situated their definitions in the skill development of reading and writing. Ms. M said,

Literacy is...Just has to do with reading and trying to get them involved with language arts. It's getting them involved with the words, reading and retelling stories, and getting them communicating with each other and communicating with me. (Ms. M, Interview 1)

Ms. C had a similar definition for literacy. She defined literacy in the following way:

“Literacy has to do with reading and writing. In pre-k, literacy is the process of learning all the pre-reading skills. It is getting the pre-k students to be more aware of what reading is, about books, and about book awareness” (Interview 1).

Both Ms. C’s and Ms. M’s definition of literacy focused specifically on the school-type skills associated with language arts curriculums. These formal literacy skills were embedded into the teachers’ discussions about their definitions and views of literacy. As mentioned earlier, both Ms. M and Ms. C received much of their literacy training through CIRCLE project as part of the SRC grant. CIRCLE (2010) also presents literacy as the development of specific skills that will result in students learning to read and write. This definition is in contrast to the socially constructed view of literacy that served as the framework for this study. (Vygotsky, 1978; Street, 2003; Barton, 1994, Gee, 2004). The influence of CIRCLE training’s skill driven focus on defining literacy moves teachers away from socially constructed literacy to more direct teaching approach. This is seen in the examples the teacher provide for about their literacy practices.

When asked to give some specific examples of literacy the teachers included phonological awareness skills as well as rhyming, syllabication, onset rhyme, and alliteration. Ms. C commented, “We do a lot of phonological awareness which I consider part of their literacy skills” (Interview 1). Writing skills were included in the teachers’ definition of literacy. Ms. M and Ms. C said they focused on writing every day. Ms. M stressed that she included opportunities for writing daily either as a group, during journals or at the centers (Interview 1).

Ms. M’s definition also included communication skills. She noted that she thought it was very important for the children to be able to communicate with people including her. Ms. M said, “Literacy is...getting them communicating with each other

and communicating with me. This is the first time they have had to communicate with others than their family. They need to be able to communicate with me and each another” (Interview 1).

In sum, the definition of literacy articulated by the teachers focused on learning to read and write and the necessary skills to accomplish this. The importance of developing communication skills both orally and written were also part of the teachers’ concepts of literacy. Their working definition of literacy focused on activities and skills that will form a foundation for their students’ formal literacy development. Again, their definition of literacy does not include the socially constructed, multiple literacies that are included in the conceptual framework that drove this study.

### ***The value the teachers placed on literacy***

It is very important. I find myself doing it even during our transition times. It is what they are learning when they don’t know they are learning. (Ms. C, Interview 1))

Ms. C stressed the importance of literacy by saying that it was very important. She demonstrated the value she placed on developing literacy skills by the amount of time that she spent involved in literacy activities during the day. She includes reading and writing skill development in every activity throughout the day. She said, “From first thing in the morning at 7:45, we do journals and all the way to lunch—that is our story and music time. The whole morning, I find, is just filled with literacy” (Interview 1). This stress on literacy activities underscores the importance she places on helping the students develop literacy in her classroom.

Ms. M also stated that literacy was very important. She said, “I think it [literacy] is extremely important because this is their first time in school” (Interview 1). Ms. M continued to explain that teaching literacy was important because often this was the children’s first experience away from home and literacy skills were necessary to



participate in the school setting. Ms. M demonstrated the value she placed on literacy by spending a large amount of time she in traditional, skill-type literacy activities. She described a large group circle time that included listening, stories, writing, identifying letters, and asking and answering questions. She also talked about literacy in transitions, small groups, and center time.

Teachers' values and beliefs guide their teaching practices (Lynch, 2009; Hindman & Wasik, 2008). Both teachers allowed the importance they placed on literacy acquisition to guide their allotment of time spent in these activities in their daily schedule. Although the SRC grant and local guidelines allocated certain portions of the day to literacy development, these teachers went beyond those guidelines. They inserted literacy activities in their routines and informal settings throughout the day.

Placing high value on the students' literacy skills in order to be successful in school showed in the teachers' discussions about their students' successes; currently and in the future. They measured success in school by the strength of their school-type literacy skills overlooking the other types of literacies that are more socially constructed and occur more frequently in homes of students from LSES households (Au & Raphael, 2000). The teachers also pointed to specific literacy skills that the students need to concentrate on to help them in the future. Ms. C remarked how learning about letters and phonemic skills would help the students be more comfortable in kindergarten and learn other reading skills. Conferences with the parents revolved around ways in which they could help their students develop literacy skills. This was evidenced in Lily's mother's discussion of how she knew Lily needed help on reading in Chapter 4. Similarly, Ms. C shared with both Marcos' and Sonia's parents specific skills that they should work on.

The value and importance of developing formal literacy skills are visible in Ms. C's and M's scheduling of their day, their focus on literacy activities, and how they stress

to parents about developing their children's reading and writing skills. Both teachers have arrived at this position on literacy through multiple sources all of which add to their overall views on literacy.

### **Development of literacy views**

Starting off you are really kind of unsure about what to teach and how. Then, you watch and observe others and you kind of pick things up from different workshops that you attend, too. So, I think what I know about literacy is continuously going to change (Ms. M, Interview, 2009).

Ms. M's expressed an uncertainty about the what and how of teaching literacy in the above comment. Ms. C noted a similar quandary when she mentioned that during her first year of teaching she depended on others to help her know what to do. Lynch (2009) found that pre-school teachers are often unsure about how they are supposed to go about teaching literacy.

Ms. M and Ms. C used several different resources to help them build their knowledge about facilitating literacy development in young children. The teachers included their university experiences, observing and collaborating with other teachers, staff development, and the curriculum. Hindman and Wasik (2008), in their work with Head Start teachers, note similar contexts where teachers develop their beliefs and knowledge about literacy. They point to professional development and observations of other teachers as having the strongest influence on teachers' literacy views. Other influences on Ms. C's and Ms. M's ideas about their teaching practices came from external demands including CIRCLE training, SRC grant, and the TSR certification program. These demands focused not on formal skill-driven literacies overlooking the more informal socially constructed literacies.

#### *University training*

Ms. M credited her university training as the foundation of her ideas about literacy and literacy development in young children. She recalled that her classes and student teaching stressed literacy and learning to read. Ms. C's starting point for her views on literacy was "on-the-job" training. As an alternatively certified teacher, she depended upon staff development, written curricula, and observations of other teachers to help her formulate her literacy constructs. She pointed to her child development courses as providing a good background for learning about teaching literacy, but did not provide practical applications.

#### *Observing others*

Working with and observing other teachers were big parts of each of the teachers' development of their literacy constructs. Ms. M shared that she had learned a lot from other teachers such as Ms. C. who had served as her mentor during her first year of teaching. Ms. M. added that you do not always know what to teach until you watch other teachers and see how and what they are teaching. The teachers were given opportunities to visit other classrooms on campus as well as at other campuses. Mrs. C stated that she learned her ideas about literacy "from other teachers, researching on the internet, and CIRCLE training," a staff development program.

The teachers also participated in common planning sessions during the week where teachers shared ideas and developed activities. These sessions provided opportunities for Ms. M and Ms. C to observe others teachers' views on literacy and their plans for incorporating literacy skills into their lessons.

#### *Staff development*

Staff development opportunities were among the ways that the teachers continued to develop their literacy constructs. Ms. M mentioned learning many of her ideas from

CIRCLE Training. Ms. M talked about incorporating some of the techniques learned at CIRCLE training,

I think my ideas have changed. During the transition times and calendar time, I might have not have asked the students to get up if their names started with the sound of a certain letter or I might have not asked them to count the syllables in the months. I find myself doing literacy skills every time I get a chance where before CIRCLE I didn't. (Ms. M, Interview, 2010)

Ms. C participated in this training the first year she taught as the Seam ISD teacher at Head Start. CIRCLE helped her to see opportunities throughout the day to reinforce the skills she was teaching. Ms. M received this training this year as part of the SRC grant. She also found that the CIRCLE training impacted her understanding of just what literacy was and how to teach it. This staff development supported the goals and objectives of the state for kindergarten and specifically for Seam Early Childhood Center. CIRCLE was the core of all the staff development. Therefore, one basic definition of literacy was presented. Multiple activities to support the skills privileged in their definition were taught, home literacies such as holding conversations, game playing, or role-playing were not included in their literacy instruction.

Other staff development opportunities offered bits and pieces of information in their formation of the teachers' views on literacy. The Educational Service Center, a state agency offering services to schools in Texas, provided multiple training opportunities throughout the year. These professional development opportunities that the teachers attended focused on literacy as well as general child development and learning methods.

### *Curriculum*

Working with the curriculum of the school was also an element in the formation of the teachers' literacy constructs. The curriculum for the pre-kindergarten was

primarily based on the Pre-kindergarten Guidelines established by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Both teachers shared that the demands of the Pre-kindergarten Guidelines guided their literacy views. Both Ms. M and Ms. C referred to the Pre-kindergarten Guidelines as a reference. Ms. C stated,

It (Pre-K Guidelines) is kind of reinforcing. It is a resource that I use. You know I look at it and say I am doing that oh yes I am doing that. And sometimes, I see something that I have missed. For a lot of the things I teach, I use my own knowledge that I have gathered from various places to make the lessons. Then I will look at the Pre-k Guidelines. I just use it as a resource. (Interview 1, 2010)

Ms. C was able to put together all of the sources of her literacy development to develop her lessons. She then used the Pre-k Guidelines for reassurance to make sure she was teaching the expected curriculum. Ms. M agreed that the Pre-k Guidelines were being stressed by the SRC grant so her focus on them had increased. Ms. M noted that these guidelines helped her to know what the students were expected to learn about literacy and she incorporated that into her thoughts about what literacy was.

### *External Influences*

Although the teachers did not name the SRC grant as a resource for their ideas on early literacy development, they included elements of the grant in many of their other factors. For example CIRCLE training was mentioned as a primary source of literacy views by the teachers when discussing staff development, curriculum, and literacy activities. CIRCLE training is mandatory as part of the SRC grant. As discussed earlier, Ms. C feels that CIRCLE has added new dimensions to her literacy practice such as incorporating letter recognition and phonemic awareness into story time.

Ms. M referred to the assessment piece of the SRC as adding to her views on literacy development and what it should include. She explained,

“The grant has us do assessments. It goes through different types of phonological awareness that the students need to understand at the beginning of the year. It

also stresses writing. They (literacy coaches provided by the grant) are teaching us how to incorporate writing into every center and everything that we do (Interview1, 2010).

Knowing what was going to be assessed provide a framework for Ms. M to use in developing her lessons.

Ms C saw the grant as not only dictating what was to be taught, but also the method. She said,

They are really pushing small groups, not our small groups that we do in the morning, but more of pulling out children with the same needs and working with them during center time or other times of the day. This is something I have not done before.

Ms. C expressed that the SRC grant also stressed what she should put in her centers and how often she should have read alouds. She went on to comment that she was following their suggestions. This was only one example of how the teachers incorporated the views of the grant into their literacy instruction. The teachers also discussed how they were using assessments to identify students with similar skill instruction need, and addressing these skills in small groups.

Applying for the TSR certificate is part of the SRC grant. TSR certificate requires teachers to upload to a website demographic data for their students, documentation of their classroom environment, the assessment tools and school attendance. The curriculum must provide instruction in phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and provide opportunities for writing in all areas of the environment. In addition, the teachers must have a systematic assessment that provides information that they use to plan specific instruction for the children (TSR, 2010). This application adds still another group of expectations that focus on the development of school-type literacies. Both Ms. C and Ms. M accepted these additions that originated from the SRC and incorporated them into their own views.

## ***Conclusion***

Although starting from different places in their education about literacy, both teachers developed similar definitions of literacy revolving around literacy as a set of skills that resulted in the student's ability to read and write. These definitions did not include the concepts from NLS of socially constructed literacies that refers to literacy as a social process which focuses more on the interaction, contexts, and experiences of the students than their individual literacy skills (Gee, 2000). Instead, the teachers' experience molded their literacy definitions to match the curriculum guides and expectations of the school. Observing other teachers and staff development opportunities were resources for the teachers to use in their development of their constructs of literacy. In addition, expectations and mandates from the SRC grant added specifics to their literacy teaching and beliefs (Stewart, 2004; Teale et al., 2010).

The teachers' ideas about literacy are continuing to change as they mature as teachers. These ideas about literacy are not static; they are changing. Ms. C and Ms. M shared how their overall views on literacy had changed since they began teaching. Ms. M stated, "This is my second year; I am learning all different things about how to do everything." She also added, "I think that it is continuously going to change." The teachers point to the influences of the SRC grant and Pre-K Guidelines as contributors to their concepts about literacies. These initiatives add specific requirements including types of assessments, instruction delivery methods and classroom environment to the teacher's daily instruction. Fulfilling mandates such as the SRC grant, impacts teachers' literacy concepts (Stewart, 2004; Teale et al., 2010). In addition, as the teachers expand their knowledge about literacy development, and are exposed to more perspectives such as NLS, their views may also be impacted. Their knowledge base will expand through

learning from other teachers and staff development. Involvement in this research study will have an impact as well as other research they encounter.

### **LITERACY IN THEIR PRACTICE**

Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2003) state that “effective early literacy instruction provides preschool children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and social support that encourage early forms of reading and writing to flourish and develop into conventional literacy ”(p. 3). Both Ms. M and Ms. C noted that they used the perspective of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in making their instructional decisions. DAP focuses on providing children with learning opportunities that take into consideration not only what the teachers know about the child development, but what they know about the student in particular as well as their culture and the culture of the community (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). DAP focuses principles which include providing opportunities for children to guide their own learning. Teachers focus on providing active learning experiences that nurture a child's social/emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

Ms. M and Ms. C described their own classroom as very active classrooms with multiple activities going on throughout the day. Their descriptions of their classrooms include many elements that are considered best practice by NAEYC such as learning centers, play opportunities, large and small group instruction, and activities designed with their students in mind (Interview 1).

In this section, I will examine the teacher’s literacy practices and how they have been guided by their understandings of DAP and the external forces that were discussed earlier, i.e., the SRC grant and its components including CIRCLE training and TSR certification. First, I will look at the influences from the mandated policies and then look specifically at their instructional practices. In analyzing their practices several themes



emerged from the data that defined how the teachers incorporate early literacy development in their classrooms. These include how the teachers used the classroom environment to develop literacy skills, their use of direct literacy instruction, and their use of varied instructional arrangements to facilitate literacy development.

### **External Influences**

Well, they [SRC and Pre-k guideline and my ideas about literacy] match up pretty well. The Guidelines are all about the phonemic awareness pre-reading skills that we do with the SRC. They talk about rhyming...They (Pre-K Guidelines and SRC) do talk about writing and about they can recognize their name. They match pretty well. (Interview 1)

Early Childhood educators express concern over the recent emphasis on academic literacies and the mismatch between the stress on direct skill teaching and more developmental appropriate practices (Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2010). Teale, Hoffman, and Paciga (2010) state concern that the influence of the National Early Literacy Projects (NELP) on early literacy instructions will lead to literacy teaching “that is not maximally effective for 3-, 4-, and 5-year olds” (p. 1). They also add that the narrow focus and unclear description of the research will result in a “skill-and-drill” approach to literacy (Teale et al., 2010, p.2). This approach moves the literacy focus farther away from NLS perspective and more towards a direct skill driven approach. Ms. C’s statement above is an example of how she has taken the emphasis of skills from the pre-K guidelines and the research based SRC grant initiatives and incorporated them into her own views of literacy instruction. Ms. M also has meshed the views of the SRC grant and pre-k guidelines in order to create a match between her views and the literacy practices that she is expected to teach. For example, Ms. M pointed out that there were new things that she needed to added to her literacy teaching plans because of the grant including writing in every center (Interview 1).

Ms. C and Ms. M both look to the guidelines and the mandates of the SRC grant for validation about what the students need to know. They also strive to have developmentally appropriate classrooms that are active and use discovery learning. Ms. C said, “I think my approach is developmental, but I also need to include all the phonemic awareness” (Interview 1). Therefore, when examining the literacy practices of the teachers, the match of views with the new mandates of the SRC grant needs to be considered. This was important because of the many references the teachers made to SRC grant or CIRCLE training and their influence on their classroom.

NELP (2008) research looks toward how successful the students are in kindergarten and first and second grade instead of looking at their current practices for measures of success (Teale, et al., 2010). The beginning of the year (BOY) TPRI test is used to test determine how successful students are according to the SRC and TSR certification (TEA, 2009; Texas School Ready, 2010). This idea of success privileges one type of literacy over another (Au & Raphael, 2000). This focus on being successful in kindergarten guiding the teachers’ instructional practices can be seen several times in the teachers’ discussions. Ms. C expressed the outcome of an activity as resulting in making kindergarten easier for her students. For example she said, “It [the literacy activity] is very important so that they [the students] are comfortable with reading before they go to kindergarten where there is a lot more pressure on it and a lot of skills added into reading. They get frustrated and discouraged.”

Ms. M also stated her main goal is to prepare her students for the future. This was evident when she spoke about her work with Robin and Israel.

The moment I realized that they were understanding their letters, they knew all their letters upper and lowercase, I started pulling them and doing sight words and word families. I am trying to get them on the right path for those reading skills in kindergarten. (Interview 1)

Focusing on academic type skills was at the center of the teachers' construct of literacy and at the center of the school's curriculum goals. These were reinforced by the SRC grant and the pre-k guidelines through the academic emphasis of CIRCLE training and the SRC coaches who visited the classrooms. The teachers had taken their DAP prospective and added a strong skill element to arrive at a philosophy that matched what they were expected to do. This influence on their literacy views from a very direct-teach model skill driven model focused the teachers away from other possible literacy views including the social construction and multiple literacies. Similarly, NAEYC in their book, *The Intentional Teacher* (Epstein, 2009), also has relooked at some literacy and noted that there are skills that will not develop on their own, but must be intentionally addressed. However, they do not focus on a drill approach.

Much like the dilemma that faced kindergarten teachers several years ago, pre-k teachers are working at holding to developmental views of literacy which are more socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1978) and meeting the demands of current literacy instruction trends (Goldstein, 2007; Roskos et al., 2003). Teale, Hoffman, and Paciga (2010) point out that the current trend places oral language, comprehension, social language, natural vocabulary development, and content area development at the "opposite end of the spectrum" from what NELP is advocating as research based literacy instruction. These areas are important in a DAP approach to literacy in pre-kindergarten. The teachers desire to include both focuses in their classroom as can be seen how they use their environment, utilize various instructional arrangements and activities, and include direct instruction as part of their literacy practices.

### **Environment**

The teachers in discussing the environment of their classroom focused on three different areas. They included the emotional environment, the physical environment, and

the temporal environment. The following sections will look at how the teachers use these different environments in their literacy development practice.

### ***Emotional environment***

I think you need a really positive environment, a friendly environment and some place where they feel safe for literacy development to take place. (Ms. M., Interview 1)

Providing an environment and schedule that was child-centered and comfortable for the students to learn was part of the teachers' requirements for a successful pre-kindergarten. This was evidenced in the above quote from Ms. M. She felt that the students must have the right environment to learn. She added, "I think they need to have a teacher that they trust and love. [They need] somebody that makes it exciting for them to be there" (Interview 1). Ms. M shared the desire to provide a comfortable and fun environment for her students to be successful. She said, "Pretty much all day is filled with something that they like and enjoy" (Interview1). Best practices as outlined in the Texas Pre-kindergarten and Head Start Guidelines stress the importance of creating environments where children are eager and excited to learn and where good teachers "acknowledge and encourage children's effort" (TSRC, 2010). Texas School Ready!™ Certification standards (2010) add that "In fact close teacher-child relationships in child care are related to greater phonemic awareness and better language, communication, and math skills, as well as more positive attitudes and perceptions, better social and thinking skills, and fewer problem behaviors (p. 19). The teachers' place importance on the students feeling comfortable and motivated in their classroom resulting in an environment that was conducive to learning. This is supported in the literature on literacy development as well as the NAEYC (2009) accreditation criteria (Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

### ***Physical Environment***

When discussing the physical environment of their classroom, environmental print and labeling was expressed as important for their classroom (Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Whitehead, 2007). Both teachers labeled objects in the room and provided examples of print such as brands, logos, and familiar words in their writing centers and throughout the room. Ms. M explained that the students often had made reading connections with print through environmental print. She said, “Sometimes they can make the connection that the McDonald sign or the Wal-Mart sign and know what they mean” (Ms. M, Interview 1). Ms. C uses environmental print in the room to help the students learn to write. She explained, “We are learning about food so I have H.E.B. up there for our environmental print and other objects labeled. I encourage them to write somehow. They can use the labels.” NAEYC and IRA (1998) joint position paper on reading and writing states, “Highly visible print labels on objects, signs, and bulletin boards in classrooms demonstrate the practical uses of written language” (p. 5). CIRCLE’s trainings also point to the importance of using word walls, labeling around the room, and offering examples of real world writing such as making lists, sign in sheets, and messages (CIRCLE, 2009). By labeling the classrooms, print is given importance and real life meaning and purpose is given to the written word (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

### ***Time***

A schedule that alternated between active and passive activities, incorporated times for self-direction and opportunities for socialization was important part of the classroom environment for both Ms. C and Ms. M. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) note that effective early childhood teachers provide times of structure and times of inquiry to promote literacy development. Ms. C commented that she tried to have times for her

students to “be in charge” and times that they were sitting and listening (Interview 1). Copple and Bredekamp (2009) also note that it is “vital to young children’s learning and development” (p. 40) to have significant periods of time when they can choose their activities. Learning centers and outdoor play offer the students these opportunities. Ms. C and Ms. M included both learning centers and outdoor play in their daily schedule.

### ***Summary***

The classroom environments of both teachers followed the suggestions for developmentally appropriate classrooms as outline by the NAEYC (2009). The teachers incorporated the ideas from CIRCLE training into the development of their classroom settings. CIRCLE practices are based on scientifically research that promotes using practices that have been shown to be effective in teaching literacy skills (CIRCLE, 2010). Using both DAP and CIRCLE as the framework to discuss their classroom environments, the teachers included both physical environments and emotional environments that helped to develop literacy skills. The teachers developed a print rich environment through labeling and including writing in every center. They used their schedule to offer different levels of activity and situations that included literacy in real life settings and helped to develop a disposition that is important to literacy development (Roskos et al., 2003; NELP, 2008).

### **Instructional Practices**

Including a variety of teaching arrangements, routines, and various activities facilitate literacy development was a part of the teachers’ literacy constructs. Both teachers used whole group instruction, small groups, centers, outdoor play, routines, and one-to-one teaching as part of their daily schedule. Literacy experiences were present in each of these settings. The teachers used a variety of activities and teaching methods to individualize their instruction. Having a “bag full of literacy activities and tricks” aids

teachers in helping the students develop literacy skills (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). Using these activities and arrangements to intentionally to develop literacy was a best practice strategy used by both teachers (Epstein, 2009).

### ***Instruction arrangements***

Teachers make purposeful use of various learning arrangements including large groups, small groups, and centers (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Ms. C and Ms. M use these formats to help the students develop their literacy skills and meet the literacy requirements of the SRC which include working in small groups, incorporating structured read alouds, at least 45 minutes of center time, and opportunities for large group learning times (CIRCLE, 2009). NAEYC (2009) also iterates that excellent teachers match the format to the student and the activity to maximize learning. This is true of these teachers. When asked which instructional arrangement was the most successful for their students, both teachers stressed that it depended upon the students.

Making decisions about instructional arrangements is an important component of providing developmentally appropriate early childhood education (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Ms. C and Ms. M both commented that they tried to use different learning arrangements such as small groups to reinforce literacy skills when the students needed extra help. Ms. M expressed the importance of fitting the instructional setting to the student. She said,

Sometimes a small group is not successful for all the children. You have to reteach; you find times that you have to reteach in small groups, you have to reteach in whole groups, or sometimes you have to just pull children individually to work on a specific skill.

Small groups are one of the instructional formats that Ms. M and Ms. C use in their classroom. The others included in this discussion are large groups, routines, and centers.

### **Small groups**

Ms. C shared her thoughts on why she used a small group setting for different children:

I think [working in small groups] is more helpful for the children that are struggling or that don't have as much experience with letters or experience with literacy. [Students] that have a lot of experience with literacy are able to pick up on skills in a large group and when we are transition. (Interview 1)

The SRC (2009) grant stressed the use of small groups that are developed according to an individual skill development need. The SRC grant refers to the findings of NELP (2007) to identify six important areas that need to be remediated in small groups. Additionally, NAEYC and IRA (1998) in their joint position paper state that “young children benefit most from being taught in small groups or as individuals” (p.10). This has been incorporated into the literacy learning arrangements of both teachers.

### **Large groups**

Large groups are utilized in both classrooms. Story time, morning news, and content lessons are examples of instruction that typically takes place in large groups (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1999). SRC grant stresses the importance of teachers including several books daily. Ms. C commented that they read at least three books a day in a large group setting. She said,

We read one in the morning during calendar or circle time and we read two during our story time. We have a designated story time and students know exactly when it is, they know what comes before it and what comes after it and what we do in it. It is an important part of our day. (Interview 1)

Ms. C noted that story time was an important part of the day. Researchers agree that story time is one of the important activities that young children can engage in (Bus et al., 1995; Whitehurst et al., 1994). Researchers add that the conversations and interactions that take place when children are actively participating during story time add rich literacy practices (Whitehurst et al., 1994).



Ms. M also commented on storybook reading as one of her “informal” literacy activities. She described how she would use storybook reading to teach reading skills. She explained:

You could start with reading a story. You could introduce it with “I want you to listen for certain words as we are reading. Some of them have the same ending. Some have the same beginning. Tell me if you can find those words.” You would show examples of what you mean as you read the story.

Although Ms. M referred to storybook reading as an informal literacy activity, she described her delivery of the story as a formal, school-type literacy. This was an example of the formal reading activities that went on in her classroom during large group time.

Book and print awareness are also literacy skills that are taught during story time. Ms. C commented book awareness that she encouraged during story time.

We do a lot of book and print awareness. I want them to be familiar with the book so that they will be comfortable in later grades with it. So that they know the back of the book, the spine, the vocabulary about a book. I am constantly asking them what do I do after this page and they will tell me turn the page so I have them answer a lot of questions while I am reading about a book. I also want them to be aware that words have meaning and we read words. (Interview 1)

Instructions, information, or experiences that each of the students need to take part in are best done in large group settings (Kostelik et al., 1999). Ms. M’s expressed the importance of providing common experiences in large group settings. Ms. M alluded to the idea of creating an opportunity of situated literacies, but her focus remained on school-type literacy activities. The examples given of the shared experiences were directly related to literacy skill development rather than sharing experiences that the children or parents might want to share. This is what the curriculum and SRC grant stressed to the exclusion of home literacy practices.

## **Centers**

Learning centers were places where the teachers incorporated literacy activities often relating them to home activities. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) note that making

decisions about how and where they spend their time are “vital to young children’s learning and development” (p. 40). They also note that centers require teacher support and involvement for centers to be of “optimal value to children” (p. 40). Centers take thoughtful planning of materials and activities. This can be seen in the description that Ms. C shared about her writing center. She said,

We have a writing center, they love making cards.” This year the students appreciated making cards for family members and friends. So at Christmas time they could do one Christmas card a day. They had to write their own words. I gave them ‘dictionaries’ of words that they might use. They love getting envelopes, so I have invested in envelopes just to get them to go to the writing center.

This is an example of how Ms. C observed the children and planned her center to capitalize on the students desire to make cards. Making cards in the writing center is an example of a home literacy that Ms. C intuitively included home literacies without specific knowledge of them.

Centers provided opportunities to focus on play and home literacy practices at school. The dramatic play center was an example of how this format of instruction was included in their classrooms. Both teachers turned their dramatic play center into various settings to match their thematic units such as grocery store, pizza shop, or a doctor’s office. Following the CIRCLE training concept of play, each teacher worked to create opportunities for planned and purposeful play through their designing of their centers.

The teachers emphasized that center opportunities encourage vocabulary building and language skills. The library center and art center were also important part of the teachers’ literacy practice. They discussed how they tried to make them interesting so the students would choose those centers. They also stressed that each center had opportunities for reading and writing. Opportunities and materials for students to engage in reading and writing at every center is a primary requirement of the SRC grant (CIRCLE, 2009). Ms. C said, “In the art center we have letter stamps to make out of play

dough and stamps in the art center—so literacy is everywhere.” Both teachers commented several times that they worked to have books and writing opportunities in each of their centers.

### ***Routines***

Copple and Bredekamp (2009) note that routines are a format where “valuable learning opportunities occur” (p. 40). They continue to add that these routines can be found in “arrival and departure, cleanup, hand washing, meals and snacks and transitions (p. 40-41). Following routines was important to literacy learning in the data from the teachers’ interviews. Routines were cited as important to literacy because they helped the students be on task and participate. Ms. C talked about Jeffrey when she gave an example of how the school environment and routines helped him. She said,

I just think that it is really helping him to be in school to be in a school setting. It is helping him be more comfortable and not to be shy when asking questions. I see him answering questions and raising his hands more than he did at the beginning of the year. (Interview 1)

Ms. M had similar stories to tell about routines being important to learning. She noted,

I think the child needs to understand the routines and the directions given in order to begin the process of learning to read and write. If you have a child that does not want to learn or follow directions, their comprehension is not going to be there for them to learn. Interview 1

Ms. M and Ms. C both valued routines as opportunities to practice literacy skills. They noted how during routine times of the day, especially transitions, they incorporated these skills.

### ***Activities***

When talking about literacy activities in their classrooms, they stated that they enjoyed sharing their ideas with me and explaining why they did them. There was little

hesitation or wait time in answering questions about their activities that prompted literacy. Specifically they talked about reading and writing activities that were traditional and done in small group or large group settings, their incorporation of literacy activities in their centers, and how they varied and modified activities to support all the students.

Writing was also incorporated into many of the activities. Both Ms. C and Ms. M referred to the grant as “having them include writing in everything they do.” Ms. M gave this specific example.

Writing with the new grant that we are doing, they are teaching us how to incorporate writing into every center and everything that we do. So, in the science center we have done with pumpkins and gourds. We are using our magnifying glasses to look at them. Then we are going back and we have crayons and pencils and different things like that to go back and draw what they saw. (Interview, 2010)

She provided teacher made, student specific materials for the students to use when they were writing, many of which she had made in previous years. She described one material:

And I made a dictionary which I have in my writing center. I have made it with the vocabulary from the units. For example, if we are learning about winter there is a picture of hibernation and the word hibernation very large. I have the students' pictures with all their names. I am constantly putting in the vocabulary we've learned and there are pages that stay in there all year like the birthday, the family, and the friends' pictures with their names. (Interview 1)

Ms. C also pointed out that she puts in pages with words that the children suggest.

Including technology in the classroom was included in Ms. C's discussion of her activities. She commented, “We use computers in our centers. We do a lot of things on computers with literacy and letter recognition.” She also added that books on CD and CD players were in her library to allow children to listen to their favorite books. She also used the computer to create learning materials such as picture schedules and social story books. Ms. C discussed her technology use in response to the general prompts about literacy activities in her classroom. Her technology comments were not in response to

any questions or prompt. Ms. M did not mention any technology in her interview and I did not include a question or prompt in her interview.

Examples of literacy activities were given by the teachers to explain their literacy constructs. They were most comfortable relating their thoughts to specific activities. Although the purpose of the activities was learning reading and writing skills, they also mentioned involving other literacy practices in their explanation of the activities. Technology was not a big part of the activities that were mentioned. In fact, only Ms. C included the computer and CD player in her activities. The teachers also related their activities to either the grant or the curriculum that they were working showing the impact of the school on their practices.

### ***Direct teaching***

Roskos et al. (2003) point to the growing body of research on literacy development of young children as the “basis for everyday practice of early literacy education” (p. 6). They further argue that the research outlines patterns in critical areas that should be included in early literacy programs. Although preliminary, the research points to specific literacy instruction that must often be explicit and direct. NELP (2007) identify six areas that have positive relationship to later conventional skills (p. 3). These include alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming (RAN) of letters or digits, RAN of objects or colors, writing/name writing, and phonological memory (Teale et al., 2010). Teale et al. (2010) caution that this should not be script like and rigid, but embedded in developmentally appropriate practices. Ms. C. and Ms. M feel like they must work either individually or in small groups with direct instruction activities in order for the students to learn these specific skills. Ms. M commented that she works one on one with her students who need to learn the letters. Writing their name is also taught in a one on one, direct teaching format.

The SRC grant and its focus on working with children in small groups organized based on assessment data promotes the direct teaching format. Ms. C uses small groups to work with children who are need similar skill development. Ms. M noted that by using small groups following her large group lesson she was able to work specifically with the students who were having difficulties. Ms. M also added that she uses individual instruction to work on direct skill development for the children that are advanced. She noted that she pulls them one by one during nap time and during centers to offer enrichment.

### ***Connecting Vygotsky and NLS theoretical framework to the teachers' practices***

Although the teachers themselves situated their practice in the concepts of DAP rather than the conceptual framework for guiding this study, there are several points throughout their discussions where the elements of social construction of learning and NLS concepts are seen. The teachers have both focused on the DAP concept of providing activities that consider both the child's strengths and needs and their culture in developing their classroom practices. This is foundational to valuing all types of literacies and incorporating them into their classroom practices. Specific examples of how NLS and social construction concepts can be seen in the teachers' discussion of their practices. For example, the environments provided by the teachers were safe and accepting allowing for students to engage in familiar literacy practices. There are opportunities available in safe environments for students to engage in learning through scaffolding and social interaction—a fundamental concept of this study.

The teachers use of learning centers also shows how their DAP theoretical concepts aligns to the theories guiding this study. Learning centers were created and designed to provide the students with DAP opportunities which also provided ZPDs for the children to build on their existing literacies through interaction with the other

students. The example of creating a grocery store and the students shopping with lists shows how students were using Vygotsky's concepts of scaffolding and social interaction. By creating different context through their centers they were incorporating the ideas from NLS focusing on multiple literacies in different contexts.

Furthermore, in their discussions of routines in their classroom Ms. M and Ms. C both noted the their importance, but did not see these as literacy skills they brought from home nor that they were building on them creating new skills. Other examples of the presence of NLS and social construction of literacy frameworks were visible in the teachers' descriptions of using real objects and real world activities in their centers and small groups. This provided opportunities for the teachers to use their existing home literacies to construct new literacies.

The examples given above point to the natural inclusion of home literacy practices and the concepts of NLS and Vygotsky's concepts in Ms. M's and Ms. C's teaching practices. The following table provides a listing of some of the home literacies that the teacher mentioned in their interviews, but did not discuss as literacy practices. This table shows examples where the teachers are using socially constructed literacy in many different domains in the classroom.

Table 4: Home literacies in classrooms		
Home literacies incorporated in classroom but not recognized as literacy	Ms. C	Ms. M
Dramatic Play	All students	All students
Making cards	All students	
Follows direction		Lily
Listening	All students	Lily
Group activities		
Good news	All students	All students
Show-n-Tell		All students
Environmental safe and welcoming	All students	All students

print brought from home		
Coloring and drawing	Sonia	Lily and Robin
DS		Israel
Storybook reading	All students	All students
Doing their work “well”	All students	All students
Scaffolding others	Sonia	Israel, Robin
Seeking to motivate through individual interests	All students	All students

The table provides a visual of where the teachers were providing opportunities for the students to work together to practice and extend these activities. The missing element is the teachers’ understandings that these are literacy practices that can be extended into many other literacy skills and practices, both home type and school-type. This provides a foundation in the teachers’ practice that might provide a springboard to developing a broader view of literacy and literacy development.

### **Summary**

Ms. C and Ms. M had developed literacy practices that blended their foundational views of developmentally appropriate practices with the mandates of the SRC grant and Pre-K guidelines. The teachers practices also show that the requirements were accepted by both teachers as part of their job as a pre-kindergarten teacher. Ms. C did mentioned several specific elements she had incorporated into her existing practices because “the grant suggested” she do it including providing writing in every center and using data driven small groups. Ms. M did not focus on why she was adding practices; she just talked about writing in every center and working on the skills that were to be tested. The teachers’ interviews did not show any resistance or questioning of the requirements or principles put forth by the SRC grant or pre-k guidelines; they appeared to simply accepted these requirements and ideas.

By examining the teachers’ views on classroom environments, instructions arrangements, and direct teaching activities, an overall view of their literacy scheme



developed. They valued their schedules, instructional arrangements, and routines as important to their teaching of literacy. As Ms. C said, “I do literacy all day long” when she referred to incorporating it into her classroom schedule. Both teachers also used different learning arrangements to help meet their individual needs. Although not articulating that they utilized home literacies in their practice they acknowledged the differences among the students and provided opportunities for social interaction and scaffolding. The set-up of the room and schedule were developed with the goal of supporting literacy.

Epstein (2007) in her book, *The Intentional Teacher*, notes that in literacy instruction there needs to be a balance between child-guided and adult-guided experiences (p. 25). Adult-guided instruction can be seen in the small groups and one on one instruction that Ms. M. and Ms. C plan for their students. Being more intentional in teaching phonemic awareness during large group time and transitions was also incorporated by the teachers. Ms. C. commented that CIRCLE training had taught her how to include beginning sound and rhyming instruction into many of her daily activities. Direct instruction was discussed by the teachers in most of the instructional arrangement. They tried to work skill practice into more developmentally appropriate activities as well as more structured, direct practice. For example, Ms. M stated that she likes to play games so that the “students don’t really know they are working.” This is another example of how Ms. M and Ms. C tried to mesh the mandates of the SRC grant and their foundation of developmentally appropriate practices.

## **Conclusion**

The teachers’ literacy practices were defined by several elements of their teaching including external influences, primarily the SRC grant, and their desire to have a

developmentally appropriate classroom. Elements of both influences were seen in the environments of their classroom and their literacy practices. The teachers focused their literacy ideas on academics and preparing their students to develop formal reading and writing skills so that they would be successful in kindergarten. However, they recognized the differences in the students' entry literacies and included this understanding into their development of activities. Knowing their individual students helped them to individualize.

Discussing the elements of literacy that were present in their classroom environment and the activities that took place daily helped the teachers articulate their definition of literacy and literacy practices. Focusing on the practice and specifics of their literacy teaching provided concrete examples of their literacy ideas. Although the teachers were using a narrow definition of literacy, they were open to learning new concepts and expanding their definition. They commented that they felt their ideas about literacy had changed from when they started teaching and would continue to change (Interview 1).

The influence of the SRC grant and Pre-K Guidelines was evident in the emphasis that the teachers placed on developing specific literacy skills. However, they also included more DAP activities such as centers and outdoor play as well as making their small and large groups opportunities for interactions and unstructured and structured learning. The home literacies that the teachers specifically addressed were the school-type literacies such as storybook reading and environmental print. In explaining activities and ways that they motivated and individualize for particular students they were including many home literacy practices without realization of the important literacy practices they were describing. They had incorporated Vygotsky's social construction of learning and the NLS concepts into their practices intuitively.

In describing the teachers' practice, at times it appears that they are one teacher. Although they have very similar teaching practices, they are each a unique teacher who has many special characteristics in her teaching practice. Several reasons for their similar practices were noted in the data. First, Ms. C served as Ms. M's mentor teacher. She provided many lesson plans, ideas, materials and support during Ms. C's first year of teaching. When asked to describe their ideas on what pre-kindergarten instruction should be, they both referred to active, constructed learning that was developmentally appropriate. They also have the same planning time and are partner teachers. They do not team teach, but their classes go to P.E. and other special classes together. Ms. C and Ms. M were the last two teachers hired on this campus and are around the same age. They share activities both inside the school and outside the school.

Several differences in their practices also were noted in the data. As seen above, Ms. C uses technology in the classroom, while Ms. M does not. Ms. M mentioned working with students to provide more advanced reading instruction to those students she saw as needing to be challenged. On the other hand, Ms. C focuses more on the students who need extra help, especially since she has several students with disabilities in her classroom. Some of these differences can be seen in their reactions to their students' literacy stories. The next section will look specifically at the pre-kindergartener's literacy stories. To allow each teacher's voice to be heard about her reactions to the stories, I will discuss the teachers separately. I will use three areas to organize the reactions the teachers shared with me. First, the teachers' knowledge about their students and their literacy skills and how they developed that knowledge will be discussed. Second, I look at the teachers' reactions to their individual student's literacy stories that were written from the data collected in the interviews and visits. And finally, I will

review the teacher's reactions to the stories and what they will mean to their own teaching practice.

### **“LITERACY STORIES” FROM THE TEACHERS**

Analyzing the data from the first interviews with the teachers, it was apparent that they had developed an in-depth understanding of each pre-kindergartener's literacy skills and development. In their discussions of the students and their skills, they describe their own 'literacy stories' that they developed from their interactions with the students and families. These stories developed around two basic categories: the students' stories at the beginning of the year and the stories that had developed throughout the year. The ways in which the teachers developed these stories and learned about the students' literacy and their family practices was also an important element of their discussion. This discussion focuses more individually on the students and teachers. Therefore, I will discuss each teacher separately under each topic.

#### **Literacy skills –At the beginning**

Each teacher responded to the questions about literacy skills and practices their students brought to pre-kindergarten in their “literacy backpacks” with specific information. I will first discuss Ms. C and her students.

#### ***Ms. C's students' literacies at the beginning***

Ms. C reported that Jeffrey came to school with many literacy skills. She added that he has many different home experiences. “Mom works with him a lot at home. I know Mom had worked on sight words because Jeffrey came in talking about them, and sight words are something we had not talked about in Pre-k” (Interview 1). Ms. C noted other home literacies that Jeffrey had developed including knowing his letters and his sounds.

Conversely, Ms. C. noted that Marcos and Sonia both entered pre-kindergarten not knowing any letters, letter sounds, or able to write their name. Ms. C commented:

Marcos did not know how to write his name and he didn't know any letters , but he did know his colors. And he was familiar with a book, but I don't think that he had been read to a whole, whole lot; but it was enough for him to come in and catch on very quickly.

Although Ms. C noted that Marcos did not have the same skills as some of the other students, she added that it did not hinder his progress. She did not elaborate on other literacy practices that provided a framework for his success in response to the questions about what literacies Marcos brought with him.

Ms. C had similar difficulty in articulating Sonia's beginning literacy skills. She noted that she did not know letters or sounds nor could she write her name, but did have some literacy skills. She said,

Sonia is a great writer. She is one who likes to go to the writing center and be writing letters to people and writing cards and keeping envelopes and labeling them. She was just not writing her name. She does like to write a lot. (Ms. M, Interview 1)

Ms. C added that she was confused by Sonia's limited literacy skills because of the foundation that her sister had when she taught her in pre-kindergarten the previous year. "Her sister came in knowing how to write her name, a long name, and Sonia did not know how to write her name" (Interview 1). She also added that she realized that she should not compare siblings, but she knew that the family worked with the children. Ms. C's confusion focused on some prior knowledge of the family and their family literacy practices. She realized that she had to look at Sonia's own personal literacy skills, but knew that a foundation was there to build upon.

### ***Ms. M's students' literacies at the beginning***

Israel came in knowing all of his letters—upper and lower case. He was able to recognize 17 sounds if not more. He has just come in with a lot of letter knowledge and you can tell he has been practicing those skills at home. You can

really tell that things like that are worked on at home in literacy. (Ms. M, Interview 1)

As Ms. M noted, Israel brought with him a strong phonetic background. His family had supported his literacy development by teaching him his letters and sounds. This explanation of Israel's beginning literacy skills was similar to the vignettes the teachers shared on each of their students albeit the focus was primarily on school-type literacies.

Robin also brought school-type literacies with them to the classroom that were very similar to Israel's (Ms. M, Interview 1). Ms. M commented on Robin's literacy skills at the beginning by saying,

Definitely a lot of work had been done at home to get Robin ready for school. Right off the bat, actually the second day, she remembered all the rules I talked about first day. She was reminding me that I needed to use my clapper which is my signal that you are being too loud. (Interview 1)

Ms. M acknowledged the work that had been done at home with Robin. She went on to say that her home experiences had put her "at the top of her game" and made her an advanced pre-kindergartner.

Mrs. M. described Lily's school-type literacies as limited at the beginning of the year. "I didn't really see her recognizing any of the letters or recognizing any sounds. She did not write her name" (Interview 1). She went on to add that she still does not know her letters or her sounds and is only writing the L (Interview 1). When asked to elaborate on any literacy skills, Lily did have at the beginning of the year, she hesitated, I waited and then asked what about directions. She then added:

She definitely came in following directions and routines...She was ready for school. She was excited about school and was ready to be a big girl. She definitely does a great job of coloring, working in small groups, and participating.

Although I prompted her to think about directions, she added routines and went on adding several home literacy practices that Lily brought to school.

The teachers' descriptions of the literacies these pre-kindergarten students brought with them to school focused on letters, letter sounds, and writing their name. Seemingly, the narrow definition of literacy as specific skills appeared to be the prevailing definition for the teachers when asked to describe their students' literacies at the beginning of pre-kindergarten. As discussed earlier, the influences of their own schooling, the demands of their school curriculum and assessment components, and expectations of parents placed school-type literacies first in their minds when asked about literacy. However, when given time to rethink the questions and elaborate more, both teachers included some home literacies in their assessment of their students' beginning literacy skills. Following directions, liking school, listening to books, working in groups, and participating in activities and routines were also included in the teachers' descriptions. This same pattern of focusing on reading and writing skills was seen in the teacher's descriptions of the students' current literacies and their future literacy development.

### **Current and future literacy skills**

In response to interview questions such as tell me about your student's literacy development this year, each teacher was able to give an overall picture of the skills of the student. The teachers talked very easily about each of their students' literacy skills. Ms. C and Ms. M were not only in tune with their students' beginning literacies, they were very aware of the skills they had developed throughout the year. They also had definite ideas about what each student's future skills would be.

#### ***Ms. C's students' current and future literacy skills***

Sonia is able to rhyme and do other skills like counting syllables and alliteration and she is pretty good in math, but retaining letters she is difficult for her. She does very well in writing. That is something that her sister did well in so I was not surprised, but I guess I was a little surprise because she doesn't know what

she is writing. She knows that they are letters...She loves to write. (Ms. C, Interview 1)

Ms. C focuses on school-type literacy skills in sharing Sonia's literacy competencies. This focus was similar in all of her descriptions of her students' literacy practices during the first interview. However, in response to questions such as "Do you see them being successful?" Ms. C included many home literacy practices that the pre-kindergartners had used during the year. For example, later in the interview, Ms. C mentioned that she thought Sonia would be successful in first grade, because her parents would see that she was successful. She commented, "I know if I was really concerned and I called them and said I was concerned that she is not remembering [her letters], I know they would really help out." This reference to home literacy practice of support evidenced Ms. C's value of home practices. She also mentioned that Sonia "loves to sing and we praise her a lot for it. She catches on quickly" (Interview 1).

Ms. C also included literacy practices that were not typical school-type literacies in her discussion of her students' future successes. She described Marcos' potential as follows:

He is a wonderful student. He listens. He loves to listen. He loves stories and he is learning and I have never had a problem with him not participating He is being comfortable now that he has been in pre-k. He is dancing now and he is participating in music and loves it. He loves school now. That is really going to help him later.

Literacy practices that are seen at home including listening, love of stories, and participating in activities were among the successful practices that Ms. C felt would benefit Marcos in his future learning. Ms. C valued these practices, but did not include them in her overall discussion of Marcos' literacy development.

### ***Ms. M's students' current and future skills***

Ms. M's described Israel's current literacy as follows:



Israel is doing really good within letter sounds and letters. He has done extremely well with reading. We have probably read ten “Bob” books. That is what I began reading with him and he has just flown through them. His favorite center is the reading center. (Interview 1)

Ms. M situated her discussion of her students’ literacy development within typical school-type literacies. She described the students’ successes in learning letters, sounds, and how to write their names. They included whether they were able to name sight words and if they were beginning to decode some words. Home literacy practices were included when the teachers were discussing how they saw their students’ functioning in kindergarten. For example, when Ms. M talked about Lily’s future accomplishments, she said,

I think she will do really well because she is a great listener and she takes her time. Her work is beautiful when she colors and when she does her activities, she wants to make sure she is doing it right. And, she follows directions really well. (Interview 1)

Ms. M expresses her optimism that Lily would do well in kindergarten. She pointed out literacy practices such as following directions and listening that would be factors in her success in kindergarten. Ms. M appeared to value those practices, but did not include them in her discussions on the students’ current literacy development.

Ms. M expressed complete confidence in Robin’s future learning. She said, “I know Robin has a lot of structure at home, so the structure at school really does work for her. She is reading and loves school and books. Ms. M felt she was ready for kindergarten.

## **Summary**

As seen in the details the teachers shared about their students, they were very aware of their students’ skill levels and their school literacy practices. In discussing the literacy development of their students, the comments focused on specific school-type literacies that were outlined in their school curriculum and in the SRC grant. Their

similar working definition of literacy, based upon their own education, experiences and beliefs, provided the framework for their academic descriptions of their students' literacies (Hindman & Wazik, 2008). However, when asked follow-up questions such as what literacies that would help make the students successful next year, they expanded their definition and added home literacies to their descriptions. With the addition of these types of literacies, the teachers also focused on their knowledge of the children not only at school, but also their interactions within the families. Looking deeper into the lives of the families of their students provided more background for the understanding and identification of home literacies.

#### **KNOWLEDGE OF HOME AND FAMILIES**

Each teacher felt they knew the children's families and had positive relationships with them and viewed the families as a support for their students. Both Ms. C and Ms. M worked at getting to know their student's literacy skills and practices through observing and listening to the students and their families. They were cognizant of the importance of using their available resources and opportunities to learn about their students and their families. Through formal and informal meetings and communications they were able to put together a profile of the literacy skills and practices of their students. I will share this student knowledge about each other the teachers' students separately so that each teacher's understandings of their families can be highlighted.

#### ***Ms. C's knowledge of her students' homes and families***

##### **Sonia**

Since I knew Sonia's parents the previous year it was very easy for me to talk to them and tell them about Sonia and what she needs to work on a little bit more. I know they are very busy because they have three children and one in high school right now and they are very involved with him as well. I think they might be a little too busy to be reading books to her every day and really reinforced that. But, I know if I was really concerned and called them and said I was concerned

that she is not remembering, I know they would really help out. (Ms. C, Interview 1)

Ms. C was confident that she knew Sonia and her family. She felt that she could communicate with Sonia's family if she needed them to work on specific things. She attributed this to her previous relationship with the family.

Ms. C learned a lot about Sonia's parents because they volunteer at school and on field trips. She commented that they offer to help and are always there to support Sonia in school activities by coming to activities including field trips, and volunteering to help. Ms. C gave the following example of how Sonia's family volunteered and participated in school activities. She said,

They are very involved. They are always willing to help if we have a school activity. During our dental week when the dentists (from Smile across America) came, Mom came and volunteered. They are not shy at all so Dad is always asking how they can help. On our way to the pumpkin patch they saw me, dragging the big ice chest and Dad immediately said "let me take that in my car, my wife is walking with you so I can take that." (Interview, 2010)

Ms. C was able to get to know the families in these type of situations. As she noted, neither mom nor dad are shy and freely shared information with Ms. C.

Ms. C respected that Sonia's family was very busy not only with her and her school activities but with her brother's and sister's activities as well. She commented, "They are very busy because they have three children and one in high school right now and they are very involved with him" (Interview 1). She went on to say they very active with the older son's athletic activities such as football and baseball games and included the whole family in these activities. Because of this information, she was able to understand why Sonia did not bring in her reading log as often as she could. She said, "I know she is being read to at home, I think they might be a little too busy to be reading books to her every day and really reinforce that. Sometimes they are don't have the time to fill out the log" (Ms. C, Interview 1). Because she knew the family and their home

literacy practices, she had insight into Sonia's reading not just through the reading log that was not always turned in. This helped Ms. M make decisions about how to support Sonia's storybook reading at school.

As mentioned, Ms. C had a previous relationship with Sonia and her family. She knew Sonia and her family since she had been her sister's teacher the previous year. She explained that since she had known them last year it was easy to talk to them. She also noted that knowing Sonia's sister also gave her a preconceived idea about Sonia's particular skills that was not accurate. She said,

I was surprised because I had taught her sister. Her sister came in knowing how to write her name, a long name, and Sonia did not know how to write her name. She could not tell you the letters in her name. Sonia's sister came in knowing all the letters. But Samantha picked up on things very quickly and knew a lot of things. For Sonia it is very hard for her to retain letters. She is able to rhyme and do other skills like counting syllables and alliteration and she is pretty good in math, but retaining letters she is having difficulty doing. (Interview 1).

Ms. C felt that the Sonia's parents worked with the girls at home and since she was participating in the same activities, she would have the same skills. She realized that this was not the case that literacy practices of the individual students differ even when they are from the same family. This underscores the importance of getting to know each student individually as well as their family.

Ms. C also knew about other home literary practices such as drawing and writing. Even though Sonia could not write her name, she knew that she had many opportunities to engage with writing materials and "was not worried" that she would not learn to write her name (Interview 1). Knowing about Sonia's home activities and having a relationship with her family provided information for Ms. C to individualize for Sonia and to make the most out of learning experiences.

## **Jeffrey**

Ms. C felt she knew Jeffrey's family and home activities very well. Similarly to Sonia, she had known Jeffrey and his family the previous year when he was in PPCD. Developing insight into Jeffrey's home and family helped Ms. C to understand Jeffrey and work with him and his family more effectively. For example, Ms. C noted that Jeffrey's family provides him with many books at home and reads to him often. She said, "Mom buys him a lot of books. I can just tell because when we are reading a book he will say I have that book at home so I can tell he is well taught at home."

The reading log that Jeffrey's both sends in supported the fact that he is read to at home. She said,

Jeffrey is read to at home. He is one I get a reading log from every two weeks. It is supposed to be a monthly reading log, but I told the parents that they could turn it in every week if they want to. Just write me a little note and tell me that you need another one. I don't want them to feel like they can only read one or two a day—that is why the reading log can be turned in as much as they want. Jeffrey is one who turns it in a couple times a month, at least twice a month. (Interview 1)

Ms. C was also aware that Jeffrey's mother was very concerned that he would not do well in pre-kindergarten. Ms. C knew that it was very important to communicate with Jeffrey's mother because of her concerns of him moving from PPCD to pre-kindergarten. She commented, "Jeffrey's mother has been on top of things and is very concerned with everything. She is good at emailing me. That is how she likes to contact me" (Interview 1). Having this information, made communicating with Jeffrey's mother important and easily accessible through email.

Ms. C also communicated with Jeffrey's mom face to face when she would come to school for conferences or to pick Jeffrey up early. Ms. C also communicated separately with Jeffrey's dad. Jeffrey's parents are divorced and he lives with his mother, but visits his Dad every other weekend and on Wednesdays. Ms. C holds separate

conference with the mom and the dad. She tries to keep both informed about Jeffrey's progress.

Ms. C noted that he knew Jeffrey from his being in school last year. She said, "I knew Jeffrey from last year from PPCD (Pre-school Program for Children with Disabilities) so I knew already that he was very bright and I knew his mom was very involved" (Interview 1). She commented that she attended all of the activities at school such as award assemblies, school parties, field trips, and special events. Jeffrey's mother extended her involvement by sending ideas she got off the internet to the class. One example given by Ms. C was that when they were studying foods, Jeffrey's mom sent her information on the food pyramid through an email.

### **Marcos**

Ms. C found it more difficulty to get to know Marcos' family and his home activities because his parents were very quiet and did not ask questions. She said,

By meeting his parents, during parent conference and seeing them at dismissal, I can see that they are shy as well and that they are not very talkative. They hesitate to wave at me and that is where he (Marcos) gets his shyness from. (Interview 1)

She added the parents' shyness she learned most of her information by asking questions during both formal and informal setting. Marcos' mother came to every school function and was always helpful. This gave Ms. C opportunities to interact with her. She also look the opportunity to have a short conversation with Marcos' mom on the times she would come and eat lunch with him. Ms. C noted that she would always share something about Marcos with his mom. She usually would just smile and nod her head.

Marcos' mother worked at night and this made it difficult for her to spend as much time reading with him. She commented, "Well, the only thing I know (about his reading at home) is from his reading log. He does turn it in. I actually have very few this year that don't participate or turn it in" (Interview 1). Through the home activity of

listing the books on a reading log and turning the log in when twenty books had been read, Ms. C has some insight into Marcos' storybook reading at home.

Ms. C also knew that Marcos' mother was supportive of his activities in school because she was at all of the parties, events, field trips, and award assemblies. However, she did not feel she knew as much about his home activities and families as the other two students and wished she could learn more (Interview 1).

### ***Ms. M's knowledge of her students' homes and families***

#### **Robin**

Ms. C felt that she knew Robin's family very well. She mentioned that during conferences and informal visits, Robin's mother shared a lot about the family and their activities. Ms. C commented, "I know Robin's family is involved in teaching reading and writing skills to their children directly. Mom and Dad are really pushing those things at home" (Interview 1). Ms. C also said, "Her (Robin's) Mom always shows up for all the meetings and conferences. She is always there for parties. She is very supportive of Robin and shows up for all the things we do at school" ( Interview 1).

Ms. M gave the example of talking with Robin's mom during a random visit to the classroom as a way she learned about the literacy practices that of the family. She said,

Just talking to mom about the different things that they do at home. They do flash cards. And I talked to her just working on her sounds and letter sounds so I just know that they have been really working hard at home with her flash cards and sounds. (Interview 1)

Ms. M commented that she also learned about the family from information that e-mails from Robin's mother. She commented that she is always emailing me with questions or ideas to share with the class.

## **Lily**

Ms. M felt that she had a difficult time getting to know Lily's family and home activities. She explained that Lily's mom, a single parent, had different circumstances in her life. "I know she works with her (Lily), but I also know that "she is very, very busy at home and...has a lot of family stuff going on at the time" (Interview 1). Ms. M went on to say that Lily's mother worked on different schedules and sometimes even at night. She felt that her schedules and being busy with Lily's younger sister did not enable her to spend much time with Lily working on school activities.

Ms. M also stated that Lily's mom came to all the conferences and asked questions. She was very interested in what she could do to help Lily. Lily was having trouble writing her name and learning her letters. Ms. C shared this with her mom at the conference.

Ms. M also communicated with Lily's mother through notes and phone calls. Ms. M expressed that she felt that what she knew about Lily's home and family she learned from listening and observing Lily.

## **Israel**

Ms. M felt that she knew Israel's family best because of family members working in the school district, including his mother. "I know Israel's family best because they work in the schools and that makes it easy to keep in touch" (Interview 1). Ms. M noted that Israel's mother was concerned that he would not do well in school. He had had some medical problems at birth, and she was anxious to see how he did in school. Because of this information, Ms. M made sure to keep his mother informed about how he was doing. She said that she kept Israel's mother constantly informed through conversations and emails. She mentioned that they would sometimes have short conversations about Israel when they saw each other during the day (Interview 1).



Ms. M felt that she knew about some of the literacy activities they did at home because of Show-n-Tell. She commented that he would often bring items that related to what they were studying. For example, when the unit topic was magnets, Israel brought a magnet for show and tell. She said, “I know that they are talking about school things at home’ (Interview 1). Another example of school activities being done at home was the reading log and homework. Ms. M commented that he always did his homework activities or family projects and turned in his reading log.

Ms. M said that she knew that Israel’s family supported him in his activities because they attended all the activities at the school and were interested in his progress. During conferences and informal visits, Israel’s mother would always ask for things that he needed to work on. Ms. M added that he was ahead of the pre-kindergarten standards and that she and his mother were working on sight words. This was an example how developing relationships with the families and knowing about the students individually creates opportunities to individualize instruction and provide meaningful activities (Moll, et al., 1992).

### ***Summary***

Ms. C and Ms. M both knew a lot about their families and the activities that went on in their homes. Both teachers gave examples of how their knowledge about the families led them to make decisions or do things in special ways to match their actions to the needs of the family. For example, knowing that Israel’s mother was overly concerned she made an extra effort to communicate with her. Learning information about their families is an important part of developing relevant teaching practices for their students (Ladson-Billings (1997), and an important part of helping their students’ literacy development (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). The teachers had an understanding of some of the literacy practices at home and the dispositions that the families had created, they just

did not label them as literacy skills in their conversations about the students' individual literacies.

### **Ways of knowing**

During the interviews, the teachers were asked how they got to know their families and the families' literacy practices. They responded with several different methods or situations that produced this knowledge. Included in these were formal and informal parent conferences, communications with parents, and prior relationships with the families.

Opportunities for formal interactions with parents are built into the school's policy. Parents and students start the school year with a Meet the Teacher Night before the first day of school. Yearly there is also a group meeting and two parent conferences (TISD, 2009). Each teacher meets with the family during the first month of school. All six of the families attended each of these scheduled meetings. These meetings provided opportunities for the teachers to get to know the families.

Communications outside of conferences and face to face meetings were also ways the teachers felt they gained insight into the families. Email provided opportunities for the teachers to get to know their student. Reading logs the students turned in provided information about their reading at home.

Another way in which information was added to the teachers' understanding of the families was through previous relationships either through personal acquaintance such as Ms. M knowing Israel's family from work or from previous professional interactions such as having a sibling in their class previously.

These multiple ways of learning about their students' families provided valuable information to the teachers which guided them in making decisions about instruction and communication styles.

## **Summary**

Ms. C and Ms. M both knew their students literacy accomplishments. This was evident in both the teachers' interviews as they described each individual student's skills and overall development. They were able to describe what the students were able to do at the beginning of the year and then their current literacies. When asked about their students' future success, the teachers focused not on specific school-type literacy skills that were measured for their progress reports, but on home literacy practices such as listening, following directions, and asking and answering questions. There was evidence that the teachers were aware of the importance of these practices, but did not see them as literacy practices. Using their working definitions of literacy as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the teachers seemed to overlook many of their students' literacy practices and the opportunities to build bridges from home to school.

In discussing their students' literacy development they also explained how they had come to acquire this information. By listening and observing during a variety of experiences with their students' families, they learned some of the home literacy practice of each student. This information offered a variety of ways that teachers could use to learn more about families and their practices.

The next section will discuss the teachers' reactions to the literacy stories that were developed from the research with these families. The focus of this discussion will be on the teachers' reactions to the stories and how they will or will not impact their future practice.

## **TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO HOME LITERACY STORIES**

After conducting the field base research, I compiled the data into a narrative that described the particular student's literacy experiences and practices (See Appendix). Each student had a unique "literacy story." These stories were then given to the teachers,

one at a time, for them to read. After reading a story, the teacher would discuss their reaction to the story through a semi-structured interview. The data from these second interviews were used to address the third research question. The information from these interviews will be examined in this section of the chapter.

Although Ms. M remarked that the reading and reflecting on the literacy stories of each of her students made her redefine her definition of literacy, they also served to validate many of her assumptions about the literacy practices of her families. This was true for both teachers. In addition, there were several new literacy practices and bits of information that did add to the teachers' collective understand of their students, their families and their home literacies. The data from the stories helped the teachers to zero in on specific home literacies of their students and reflect on how this information would benefit their teaching practice. In discussing the data from these post-literacy story interviews, I focus on how the stories validated the teacher's previous understandings, what new and/or contradictory information was added to their understandings, and how they could see including their expanded understanding of home literacies into their future teaching practice.

### **Validating their understandings**

Were there any surprises in Robin's literacy story?

No, The way she is at home (in the story) is the way she is here at school. I think they coincide with each other. I have a strong relationship with the mom and dad so I know a lot about their beliefs and a lot of things they try to do at home. It definitely did not surprise me in the least bit. (Ms. M, Interview, 2010)

Ms. M felt that the story painted an accurate picture of Robin and her literacies as they were seen by her in the classroom. She felt that each of the "literacy stories" supported her idea of the students' home literacies. Ms. C also felt that the individual

stories matched her perceptions of her students and their home activities. When reflecting on Jeffrey's story, she commented,

There were no surprises with Jeffrey's story because I see him with Mom in the classroom. I see her (Mom's) very strict personality. In the story she says that he responds well to me because we have some of the same ways. He does need to be handled firmly, but he loves positive feedback. (Interview 2)

Ms. C used the information from the story to validate her observations of the type of parenting that worked for mom. She added, "I see that it (her firmness) is not just at school, but at home, too." Ms C also felt that her perception of Marcos' personality matching his mother's was supported by his literacy story. She said, "Mom is exactly like Marcos, very quiet. It came true from the story."

Both Ms. C and Ms. M felt confident that they had developed a good grasp of the families' overall home literacy practices and family personalities since the stories and their personal perceptions were similar. When asked again how they had developed these ideas, each teacher added more details to how they came to know their students and their families.

Ms. C discussed in more detail in this interview how her personal interaction with the parents during field trips, parties, and classroom visits helped her gain information. Ms. C explained,

Those things that you had written about that they did at home and the things that they did at McDonald's, I had seen at school. Her parents have come on lots of field trips and she used to come last year when siblings were included on the trips. I learned a lot about them from their helping on field trips and coming to the classroom. (Interview 2)

She mentioned added that she talked to Marcos' mother in the cafeteria in the mornings and in "the car line" at dismissal. She said that she learned that she had to approach his mother and "tell her a little bit about how he was doing." She added, "She would not extend the conversation, but would smile and nod her head in agreement."

Ms. M said that she realized that she learned a lot about Israel's home literacy practices by what he brought to show and tell. She said that after reading the story she realized that he had brought his DS to school and was very excited about it. Ms. M reflected,

I focused on the items that he had brought which related to the themes we were studying. I knew that they were working on our school skills at home. For example, when we were studying magnets, he brought magnets. Mom tried to help him coordinate what we were learning with what he brought.

Ms. M acknowledged that show and tell was a good time to learn about home literacies. She added that show-and-tell also brought objects from home that were not related to our units of study could provide new insights into their home literacies. "I should have realized that the DS was important to Israel and could have used those skills at school" (Ms. M, Member checking interview).

"There were no surprises in Jeffrey's story" (Ms. C, Interview 2) points to the fact that the literacy stories provided the teachers with assurance that they had observed and gleaned information about their students and their families correctly. The stories also provided an expanded idea of some specific home literacies practices and events and clarified some others.

### ***Adding and Clarifying***

(I learned all about) Mom having her own journal and Israel having his own journal. (I found out) about Israel being able to use his journal, how they made the lists and different things that his mother had put on the mirrors, and about the text messaging with the DS. I thought that was so cool, the brothers being able to text back and forth to each other. The fact that Israel even shows an interest in wanting to see Mom's texting is great. It is a wonderful thing to see him being so curious. (Ms. M, Interview 2)

Even though Ms. M felt she knew Israel and his home literacies the best of all her students, she learned many new things from his literacy story. Her excitement about the new information was evidenced by her quick listing of all the literacy practices that

Israel, his mother, and his brother shared. She pointed out that curiosity was one of Israel's great literacy practices. She said that she sees his curiosity in class. She said,

He is always asking why questions. If something happens he always wants to know how it happened, how it got there, and what is going to happen next. He is always thinking on top of the game. Like with the books we are reading it is like Mat sat on Sam. Sam sat on Mat. He asked, "So why are they always sitting on each other?" Ms. M, Interview 2

Ms. M added curiosity and Israel's ability to ask questions to his literacy abilities after reading his literacy story. She already knew these things about him, but did not think of them as literacy practices.

Ms. M also noted that Lily's story clarified the relationship that she and Lily's mother had developed. Although she felt that they communicated well, she also felt apprehensive when talking with Lily's mother. Some of this apprehension stemmed from several specific incidents when Lily's mother was not happy with the school policies and office personnel. For example, Ms. M explained about one family project that Lily's mother did not approve of.

The only situation I was aware of was the "All about me project" because we had a conference about that. She had discussed with me that she did not think it was an appropriate project because it would make children feel uncomfortable that would not bring one. After sharing our plans and measures for making all the children feel successful with the project, Mom felt better. (Ms. M, Interview 2)

Ms. M went on to explain that she did not really understand why Lily's mother disapproved of the project. She said that after reading Lily's "literacy story" she understood. She said,

When I read Lily's literacy story, about how in the beginning when you walked into the house and you saw no pictures and no decorations it hit before I continued reading why that project was inappropriate for her...she doesn't represent family like that. And she mentioned that pictures including the girls' father made her sad, that is why it was hard for her to do the project. Knowing that made me understand better and will make me think more about the project later. (Interview 2)

Ms. M said that previously she was a little apprehensive about talking to Lily's mom, but after reading the story and see that the family included her in their daily conversations respectfully, she became more confident. She said,

It (reading the stories) made me feel better. I felt that she was more positive about me; which made me feel better because I didn't really think that she liked me at all. She was positive about what I am doing with what Lily was doing in the school so that made me feel better. She appreciates me and she respects me and vice versa. (Ms. M, Interview 2)

Understanding the home practices and the support she was receiving in Lily's home helped Ms. M to form better communication with this family and to rethink one of her assignments.

Ms. C felt that Jeffrey's literacy story held some contradictions to her understand of Jeffrey. She said,

I read in the story that he liked to write on his dry erase board. After being with him the majority of the year, I realized that he doesn't like to write. He never went into the writing center. We journal every day and it was a struggle to get his name on the paper. He knew how to write his name. A lot of the students were working hard to get a stamp for writing words and he did not care. (Interview 2)

She went on to explain how she saw this conflict.

I underlined it. He doesn't like to write. That is just him. He is really smart. He knows how to write, but he was not interested in it. So, I was surprised that Mom thought he liked to write on his board and that writing on his board was common activity during the visits. The little scenario where Mom forced him to write on the board is more what I would have expected. It told me a lot.

The information that Ms. C received from the story about the importance placed on writing at home and the situations surrounding it gave her some insight into why Jeffrey did not choose writing at school.

Technology was also a new addition to the teachers' literacy descriptions of their students. Interesting to note that technology was not mentioned by either teacher in their description of the literacy skills of their students. Ms. C did mentioned the computer station once in her description of her classroom. However, in the literacy stories of the



students digital media was a big area of their literacy practices. Ms. C shared her thoughts on what she learned about Marcos and his digital literacy practices.

What impacted me the most was that they had a lot of technology, which isn't surprising because as you said they are young and his father seems that he would like video games and TV and computers, and therefore Marcos would, too. Marcos was very good in computer class so I could see that he had been exposed to it before. (Interview 2)

Ms. C looked on this new information as something she had overlooked and possibly could have helped her in working with Marcos and his family. Ms. M also noted the abundance of digital literacies in her students' stories. As mentioned earlier, she was impressed with Israel's DS texting and interest in his mother's texts.

### ***Summary***

Ms. C and Ms. M found the literacy stories interesting and acknowledged that they had not looked at the students' literacy development and accomplishments through this wider lens of home literacy practices. Ms. M expressed her "aha moment" when she reflected that when first talking about literacies she had pretty much kept to things like reading and writing, but the literacy stories had changed her mind about literacies and home literacies. She gave an example about Robin's family labeling things in their home. She said,

Labeling things, I guess to me, I have always seen it just as a school thing, but bringing it back to home I see there is so much you can do at home through reading newspapers, cooking with your children, showing the different words, labeling things. There is just so much more going on. (Ms. M, Interview 2)

Ms. M had expressed a new perception of literacy practices that go on both at home and at school. Home activities and school activities are not a dichotomy of either things the students learn at home or things the students learn at school and should practice at home. She had widened her view of literacy to embrace the NLS socially constructed view where literacy happens in multiple places and in multiple modalities

(Street 1996; Au and Raphael, 2000; Green et al., 2002; Gee, 1991). The identification and utilization of all literacy practices is important to helping the students be successful.

Ms. M's view on the importance of valuing the literacy practices of home and school were shared by Ms. C. Both teachers commented that after reading the literacy stories, they realized that they already included many of these types of home literacy practices in their daily classroom routines and activities, but had not coupled them with the concept of the process of becoming literate. Using this new expanded lens of literacy practices, their discussion moved to examining how their new literacy construct would guide their teaching.

### **Application to teaching**

I think it would big help to know some of these things that they do at home. The things that they do at home could affect what they do in the classroom. It would be helpful to know more about the children and the things they do as a family.  
(Ms. M, Interview 2)

The teachers expressed that their way of looking at literacy practices of the pre-kindergarteners in this study changed after the reading of the individual literacy stories. Each teacher felt she wanted to include some of the home literacy practices in their evaluations of their individual student's literacy abilities. Looking back at their descriptions of their students' literacy skills, they figuratively wanted to "rewrite" these descriptions.

This rewriting of their students' story would focus on how they looked at each student's literacy progress and skills. Using this broader lens of literacy as a yardstick for literacy ability, the abilities of their students will look differently. For example, during the first interview Ms. M described Lily's school-type literacies as limited at the beginning of the year. She said, "I didn't really see her recognizing any of the letters or recognizing any sounds. She did not write her name" (Interview 1). When discussing

Lily after reading her literacy story, she commented on all the skills that Lily had that would make her successful next year. She said, that Lily would do well because “she is a great listener and she takes her time. Her work is beautiful when she colors and when she does her activities, she wants to make sure she is doing it right. And, she follows directions really well” (Interview 2). This change from seeing literacy abilities measured only by school type literacies to looking at all multiple kinds of literacy when viewing their students’ literacy abilities resulted in Ms. M’s new and on literacy.

An example of how Ms. C’s new socially constructed definition of literacy made literacy skills visible when viewing her students’ achievements was in the description of Marcos in her second interview. She noted that he was dancing and singing and enjoyed talking to the other students. She even added that he was always the one she could count on to answer her questions. This inclusion of new literacies that included practices such as interacting with student and carrying on a conversation highlighted Ms. C. expanded definition of literacy which illuminated her students’ literacy abilities in a new light.

Not only did the teachers’ broadened definition of literacy change the way they viewed the abilities of their students, it also made them view some their literacy practices and instruction in different ways. Using their expanded definition of literacy, they discussed how they would capitalize on these new understandings in their practice. Their discussion focused on their realization of home literacies that they already included in their practice and their future plans for learning about their students’ home literacies and incorporating them into their practice.

### ***Incorporating home literacies in their classrooms***

During the interviews which took place after they had read their students’ literacy stories, the teachers talked about how now they felt they had an expanded view of literacies. The teachers’ expanded view focused more on the social construction of

literacy. Elements of NLS theory was also included in the teachers' new view of multiple literacies which occur in many domains such as homes, playing video games, visiting McDonald's and Wal-Mart. Once this wider definition of literacy practices was incorporated into the teachers' active construct of literacy, they shared ways in which they had been using the students' home literacies as bridges from home to school so that their students would be successful in pre-kindergarten. They commented on how they had provided opportunities for the children to scaffold their learning by interacting with other children.

One area of the classroom that seemed to be an important space for combining home and school literacy practices was in the various play centers, especially dramatic play center. Ms. C had stated earlier that centers are a place where the students make decisions and control what they play. The importance of creating a space for young children to utilize their home literacy practices and home languages is documented in the literature (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Moll et al., 1992; Moje & al, 2004). Genishi and Dyson (2009) argue that a "welcoming terrain has spaces for the strengths and resources of children who are different" (p. 10). Ms. M gave an example of home literacies guiding play at school. She shared,

I think that it (his home literacies) explains why when Israel goes to the kitchen center he makes lists and sets up the role playing saying thing like "Well we are going to go shopping today. What are we getting? Check the list." These are all activities and things that he does at home and is now doing them at school and adding new skills such as sound spelling. (Interview 2)

Ms. M. explained further that she would include opportunities in the center to learn new words in realistic situations like ordering at a pizza restaurant.

Other situations and opportunities for utilization of home literacies came to the teachers' minds. They explained how they had created groups of students with the idea of having students who learned by helping and those who learned by following a model

together. For example, Ms. C shared how she had placed Sonia in situations where she used her scaffolding skills. She explained,

Sonia likes helping, I think. She will go up to the boys that sit next to her or at the next table and show them how to write their name and they will trace over it. She likes being a helper. Mom said in her story that they pretended being teacher and student, you can tell she does because she does that here too. She does an excellent job in being a role model in our class. (Ms. C, Interview 2)

Although Ms. C had not specifically thought that she was creating a space for Sonia to utilize her literacy practices, she had done so by incorporating Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding. Upon reflection, she sees the value in orchestrating learning environments to utilize literacy practices the children have brought from home.

These were only two examples of literacy events that the teachers were already incorporating into their teaching. Both teachers recognized that they already offered opportunities throughout their school day where the pre-kindergarteners could utilize their home practices, but not to the fullest potential. Additionally, they spoke about new ideas to intentionally learn about the students' home literacies and to incorporate them in to their daily planning for instruction.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

Ms. C felt that knowing the students' home literacy practices better would be her first step to providing activities that would take what they did at home and use it at school. She said,

The pre-kindergarteners will take what they are learning at home and display it in the classroom. They will act out the different things that they are doing at home with their parents in school. They will also act out at home what they are learning in the play centers and in the writing center and reading books. Interview 2

The sharing of these literacy practices is what Ms. C. wants to develop in her future classes. However, she shared a concern. "It takes a lot of time to get to know the

children and their parents” (Interview 2). She added she feared there would be several barriers that to identifying the literacy practices at home. She explained,

Mom and Dad might have to work different schedules. Times schedules are just so hard. If they have more than one job and sometimes they might not live with Mom all the time. There are just so many type family situations that a child might live in it is difficult to get to know them unless you spend as much time as you did with them. And you are not going to be able to do that. (Ms. C, Interview 2)

Ms. M. went on to say that there might be other ways she is thinking about trying to learn more about the home literacies of her students. She mentioned that she might try surveys or questions during her conferences. She explained,

I kind of want to get an idea, maybe in the survey that we do in the beginning of the year, what kinds of literacy things they do at home with their kids or activities that they do with their children. It would give you an idea of what they are learning at home verses just at school. (Ms. M, Interview 2)

Ms. M recognized the value of knowing more about her students and their home literacies. Asking parents about activities they do at home and about their beliefs adds valuable information to understanding the students (Lynch, 2007).

Ms. C also felt that she would look more closely for home literacy practices in her student’s families at the beginning of the school year. She said, “I need to listen a little more closely to my students and moms” (Interview 2). Ms. C was referring to Marcos and his digital media. She explained,

The story said they (Marcos and his family) had a lot of technology, which isn’t surprising because as you said they are young and Marcos was very good in computer class so I could see that he had been exposed to it before.” It doesn’t surprise me that he watches a lot of TV and video games. I could have asked him what is your favorite video game and we could have had conversations about things that he likes. (Interview 2)

Ms. C continued to say that she could have built on Marcos’ home literacies and used them to help him learn his letters and sounds. She gave the example of using M like Miya and Miguel from PBS “to associate letters with things he is comfortable with and recognizes more easily” (Interview 2).

Although neither teacher had made any home visits or seen these students outside of the classroom this year, it was something that they thought they might do in the future. Ms. C said that she had been invited to Sonia's home several times, but because she lived out of town it never was practical for her. She said,

Sonia's birthday is in the summer, so it would be hard to go over for her birthday party. It is just kind of hard since I live so far from them. Yes, I would like to go see them at their house. I could see myself going over there and visiting. (Ms. C, Interview 2)

Ms. M also expressed that although she had not seen any of these students outside of the classroom, she has in the past and intends to do more in the future. She said, "I have been to other students' birthday parties, run into them at Wal-Mart and the grocery store. I have been to some baseball games" (Ms. M, Interview 2). She expressed that she would like to do more in the future. Both teachers felt that it was important to build these opportunities into their plans for communicating with the families.

Ms. C and Ms. M felt that the literacy stories about their students changed the way that they were thinking about literacy development for their pre-kindergarteners. Ms. C discussed that she now realized that in order to understand a student's literacy skills you must include their home literacies to get the true picture of their literacy skill. Ms. M added to those thoughts when she commented that there was just so much more going on literacy-wise at home than she realized.

The stories not only added literacy practices to the teachers understanding of their students, it also teased out activities that they had been already doing as part of their current teaching practice that supported home literacies. Specifically, the teachers acknowledged that they were creating spaces where the students could build on their home literacy practices by using centers and small groups as well as providing one on one time. They also added that by knowing more about specific students this natural inclusion of literacy skills could be honed into more expert teaching opportunities to meet

specific student literacies. For example, Ms. M said about Sonia's love of drawing, "I could have used that (information) from the very beginning of the year and encouraged her by providing lots of materials and free time for drawing. I had to kind of figure that out on my own" (Interview 2). The teachers were making plans on how to acquire this knowledge in a more systemic manner, rather than "figuring it out" as they went along.

## **Conclusion**

Ms. M and Ms. C have developed their classrooms incorporating elements that they have taken from their DAP framework, other teachers, staff developments such as CIRCLE training, and school and mandates including the Pre-K Guidelines and from the SRC grant. As they described their classrooms, many of the best practices as described in the literature were included (Coppie & Bredencamp, 2009). They had developed child-centered classrooms and were aware of and the needs of their individual students.

The teachers' literacy practices seemed to focus on academics. They included formal reading and writing skills in their constructs of literacy. When talking about the individual student's literacy development, they were very in tune to them as individuals focusing on the skills that were outlined in their curriculums and assessment pieces. However, when asked to describe what would make their students successful in the future, they added many of the home literacy practices to their explanation of the student's abilities. Refocusing the questions on what would help the students learn more added new dimensions to their literacy constructs; although the teachers did not articulate these practices as literacy.

After spending time reading and thinking about their students' literacy stories written from the data taken during the studies visits and interviews, the teachers consciously widened their working definition of literacy. As they both commented, there was so much more going on at home in literacy than then had realized. The teachers also



realized that they had intuitively been providing opportunities for the students to utilize their home literacies, but would in the future do so as part of their teaching practice. "Literacy stories" provided a scaffold for the teachers learning which they see impacting their future teaching practices.

Barriers to implementing the home literacies were also acknowledged by the teachers. In order to use the students' home literacies, they first had to know what they were. Time, both the teachers' and the families', seemed to be the biggest barrier to acquiring this knowledge. Using a narrow view of literacy that focuses primarily on reading and writing skills also was a barrier to fully utilizing home literacies. The teachers saw their thinking on literacy changed and this change benefiting their students in the future.

Ms. C's and Ms. M's discussions about their students' unique literacy stories provides a starting point for early childhood educators to think more in depth about the importance of recognizing and valuing home literacies. By valuing and building on the varied literacies that students bring with them to school in their literacy backpacks, teachers can provide needed support for the students' existing literacies and the development of additional literacy skills that are necessary for the students to meet the academic demands in this high stakes school environment. In Chapter 6, I will examine what implications and future research can be extrapolated from the data provided by the pre-kindergarteners, their families, and their teachers.

## **Chapter 6: Implications, Limitations, and Future Research**

There is so much more going on at home that I did not realize. They are developing literacy skills not just at school, but at home. It makes sense to build upon what they know. (Ms. M, Interview 2)

Ms. M's statement gets at the heart of this study. This study addresses how to use home literacy practices as bridges to students learning more formal school literacy practices. Also, the study examined teachers' views on literacy, explored ways that teachers and parents were currently developing literacy practices, and advanced possible implications for the future. These findings provide understandings of children's home literacies that could guide early childhood educators to provide meaningful experiences for their students; bridging the students' literacy practices from home to school.

A central argument in this study is that for children to be successful in schools that are driven by current standards-based reforms, teachers must build upon the students' existing literacies. First, in order to build upon students' home literacies, the literacies must be identified by teachers. Examples of home literacy practices such as environmental print and storybook reading can be found in the literature (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Green et al., 2002). However, specific examples of home literacy events of pre-kindergartners attending public school settings were not present in the literature. This study's findings help to fill that gap and provide pre-kindergarten teachers with examples of what home literacies might look like for their students.

The study further illuminates the students' specific home literacies through their individual literacy stories. These narratives took the many different literacy skills and practices of a particular student and developed it into a big picture. Sharing these stories with their teachers furthered the teachers' understandings about what home literacies were and how they were intertwined into the families' everyday life. It is important to

note that the findings from this study highlight the diversity among the home literacies and examined the commonalities that existed. The purpose was not to produce a laundry list of home literacy events (Rodriguez-Brown, 2009) and practices for teachers to pick from when getting to know their students' and their families. The purpose was to highlight explicit examples and literacy practices to serve as starting points for teachers to identify their own students' practices .

Second, through interviewing these teachers, an understanding of the working definition of literacy that these teachers are using to guide their practice in pre-kindergarten was developed. This skill-driven definition of literacy, strongly influenced by the pressures of an academic emphasis in their school, privileged formal literacies over the many other literacies that the pre-kindergarteners bring with them to the classrooms. Opportunities to build upon what the students already knew emerged. These findings also highlight the influences of federal and state mandates and initiatives such as School Readiness Collaborative on the teachers' literacy practices.

The study was guided by three research questions that were interrelated. These research questions are:

1. What literacy events and practices take place in the homes and immediate communities of a sample of low socio-economic status (LSES) pre-kindergarten children in a rural Texas school district?
2. What is the focus of the teachers' literacy instructions and the underlying constructs, including their views on home and school type literacies?
3. How do teachers see their practices being impacted by the identification of particular home literacies of their students through the literacy stories?

The findings from the study were reported in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Chapter 4 provided the data from the research with the students and their families. Literacy events

and practices were identified and discussed in detail including how these practices had connections to various literacy practices that the students would encounter in pre-kindergarten classrooms. Although there is a significant body of research on home literacies and the social construction of literacy practices (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Dickenson & Tabors, 2001; Pahl & Rowsell, 2006), there is little that speaks specifically to pre-kindergarten students in public schools who require all students to fall into either a legislated and/or academically recognized at-risk category for enrollment. A gap in the literature also can be seen in the lack of specific examples of home literacy practices for these pre-kindergarten students. Each family's literacy practices were unique, but by looking at specific details of these practices, this study provided concrete examples of home literacy practices and events of these pre-kindergartners. Knowing what home literacy events and practices looked like in these homes provides a starting point for educators to identify and understand their students' literacies.

The findings in Chapter Five discussed data from the teachers' interviews. The first interview provided opportunities for the teachers to articulate their definitions and DAP rather than the conceptual framework for guiding this study, there are several points throughout their discussions views of literacy, how they developed their literacy understandings, and how it was included in their classroom. The second interview, which was conducted after the teachers had read their students' literacy stories, gave the teachers opportunities to share their reaction to the stories. The teachers were asked what they thought about these stories and if this information would have any impact on their teaching practice. The teachers' reactions and future directions they wanted to take their literacy instruction were shared.

In this chapter, I discuss the contributions and implications that this study offers to the study of pre-kindergartners' home literacy practices and the connections these

literacies can make between home and school. The study also provides contributions on how pre-kindergarten teachers' understandings and definition of literacy play an important part in making these home literacy practices visible in their classrooms. I will then discuss the limitations and future research questions this study presents. of this study and the future need for study that it I now turn to the discussion of these contributions and their implications.

### **DISCUSSION OF CONTRIBUTIONS**

The findings from this study make several contributions to the literature on pre-kindergartners' home literacy practices and how early childhood educators can work together to identify, value, and use these practices in the classrooms. Contributing information to how teachers can identify and build upon the literacy practices that their students bring with them to the classrooms will help to close the achievement gap currently seen in school between diverse students and mainstream students. Specifically this study's contributions are:

1. The home literacy practices of the pre-kindergarteners in this study were rich and varied. The identification of these home literacies points to several misconceptions in the perception of what is happening in the homes of these low SES pre-kindergarten students.
2. Home literacies are not readily identified by the pre-kindergarten teachers. Examples of these types of literacies need to be shared with teachers to make them more visible. The importance of building upon what the students bring with them to school needs to be stressed to teachers and educators. There are challenges to helping teaching identify their students' home literacies and utilize them in their classrooms.

3. There is a strong presence of digital literacies in the homes. There appears to be a disconnect between what the students are doing digitally at home and at school.
4. The teachers' definition of literacy and many of their literacy practices are defined by external forces such as high stakes tests, school mandates, and grants that they participated in. This is affecting the teachers seeing the multiple literacy skills the students bring with them and capitalizing on them to insure the students' literacy development in traditional areas. In addition, this specific skill view of literacy is masking the connections and opportunities the teachers are already making from home to school by not valuing them as literacies.
5. The literacy stories that were written and shared from the data were very powerful. The teachers reactions to the stories expanded their view of literacy and started them thinking about ways to learn about and include these type literacies in the teaching practice.

In the following sections address each of these contributions.

### **Misperceptions about literacies in the pre-kindergartner's homes**

No single, narrow definition of 'family literacy' can do justice to the richness and complexity of families, and their multiple literacies...that are a part of their everyday lives" (Taylor, 1983, p. 4)

The findings from this study point to two misperceptions about literacy that appear to be prevalent in the current early childhood community of educators. The first misconception is that there are little or no literacy experiences taking place in homes of pre-kindergartners living in low SES homes. This study argues that this is not the case in the home of the pre-kindergartners in Seam ECC. The multiple home literacies that were identified in this study are examples of the richness and complexity that Taylor

refers to in the above quote. These examples confirm what is already in the literature about rich home literacy practices in low SES homes (Taylor, 1983; Dickenson & Tabors, 2001; Auerbach, 1989)

The idea that all literacy learning was happening at school was shared by the teachers in this study. Ms. M also shared that she had not known of the many literacy practices and events that were taking place in the homes of her students. She said, “There is just so much more going on” (Interview 2). Genishi and Dyson (2009) point to one reason this misconception has developed. They argue that many children from low SES families are not achieving on the high stakes tests implemented and are being labeled at-risk and this labeling of “at-risk” often places the children and families “as a deficient problem to be fixed, especially in the areas of language and literacy” (p.3).

The multiple home literacies that were identified in this study helped Ms. M realize home literacy events her students were experiencing at home in their daily lives. These examples of the varied and rich home literacies adds to the existing literature to help all early childhood educators make this same discovery. This study provided to the body of information about home literacies and literacy development a number of specific examples of the rich home literacies these pre-kindergarten students bring to school with them in their literacy backpacks. Through this illumination of the existence and importance of home literacy skills, the perception that students from diverse or at-risk backgrounds do not have literacy opportunities at home can be turned around and a more accurate understanding of pre-kindergartners’ literacies can be evident. The misperception that there is little or no literacy learning taking place in the homes of these pre-kindergartners is unsubstantiated in the findings of this study.

The study also points to another misperception of educators about home literacies among LSES families centering on the idea that there are specifically no school-type

literacies taking place. The view that there are limited or no literacy practices happening in the homes of LSES families discussed previously often refers to this perceived lack of school-type literacies. Although each family's literacy practices were unique, the category of school-type literacies was addressed in the findings across the cases. The study highlighted many examples of school-type literacies happening at home.

In fact, what are often considered school-type literacies such as working with specific pre-reading skills were found throughout all of the home literacy practices. For example, while running errands, Israel was in charge of checking off things on a written list. His mother used beginning sounds and context clues to help him find the correct activity on the list and check it off (Interview, 2010). This is an example of how using a socially constructed definition of literacy can help educators and researchers view literacies through a much wider lens and see the multiple elements of literacy practices in their specific context (Street, 2003).

The lines between what are considered school-type literacies and those practices relegated to being just home literacies were blurred in this study. Hull and Schultz (2002) point to the "tendency to build and reify a great divide between in school and out of school [literacies]" (p. 3). They also warn that sometimes this dichotomy "relegates all good to out-of-school contexts and everything repressive to school" (Hull & Schultz, 2002, p. 3). Brandt and Clinton (2002) warn against looking at literacy as a dichotomy. They contend that dichotomies dismiss the engagement of children with non-school learning as merely frivolous or remedial or incidental. Hull and Schultz (2002) argue that rather than setting formal and informal education literacies and their contexts in opposition to each other, "we might do well to look for overlap or complementarity or perhaps a respectful division of labor" (p. 3).



Many current researchers see the school-type literacy home literacy dichotomy as a false dichotomy that must no longer be considered in labeling emergent literacy practices. The findings from this study shows the integration of these skills into the families' other rich home literacy practices. Therefore, the dichotomy that has been created in the earlier literature might be looked upon as a false dichotomy (Pahl & Roswell 2006; and Rodriguez-Brown, 2009). Acknowledging that all literacies are happening in the homes of these pre-kindergartners will dilute the perceived dichotomy.

Instead of separating literacies as one type or another, these literacies need to overlap and complement each other to help the students interactive successful in school and all literacy contexts. Literacy practices need to be viewed not as either home or school, but both. Using the perspective that literacies are situationally constructed to help meet the needs of the moment and the environment all literacies are valuable in all environments. (Street, 2003; Barton, 1994, Gee, 2004). Therefore, this study proposes that a different terminology should be applied when discussing the literacy practices of young children that focus on the domain and use rather than skills. Using the terms literacy practices happening in the home or literacy practices happening at school would be more in line with the findings of this study and the NLS concepts. These will be the terms used in the rest of the discussion of the contributions and implications of this study.

### **Teachers' identification and utilizations of home literacies and their concerns**

The second contribution this study makes to the current knowledge on literacy practices focuses on teachers identifying and utilizing their students' literacy practices that are happening in the home. The findings from this study stress the need for teachers to identify and use the literacy practices that the students bring to school with them from home. This identification of literacies occurring in the home is important so that teachers can find ways to build on these literacy practices helping their students be more

successful in school. In order to succeed at building bridges from home to school, teachers must be knowledgeable of their students and their all their literacy practices. Knowing each student specifically is paramount to providing meaningful experiences for each of them (Haney & Hill, 2004). This study adds examples to the literature of the literacy practices found in the pre-kindergartners' homes which can be used as starting points by teachers in locating and identifying all the literacies that are taking place in their students' homes. This study also adds to the literature by giving specific examples of how some literacy practices developed at home serve as foundations for more formal school literacies. Furthermore, this study addresses the concerns of the teachers in trying to reach out and learn more about their families' literacy practices. By sharing these teachers' concerns, conversations among early childhood educators can address these specific issues making identifying easier for other pre-kindergarten teachers.

#### ***Identifying and utilization of literacies occurring in the homes by teachers***

By providing rich descriptions of the literacies found in their students' homes through the literacy stories, the teachers were able to look back and point out skills that they identified as being important to learning, but just did not connect to literacy. For example, Ms. C described Marcos as a great listener; she said, "He is a wonderful student. He listens. He loves to listen. He loves stories and he is learning and I have never had a problem with him not participating" (Interview 2). She went on to say that she did not see those practices as literacy, but now she does. The teachers had an understanding of some of the literacy practices occurring at home and the dispositions that the families had created—they just did not label them as literacy skills in their conversations about the students' individual literacies. For example, Ms. M, in talking about the labeling that was done in Robin's home, said, "I guess to me I have always seen it just as a school thing, but bringing it back to home there is so much you can do"

(Interview 2). Examples of these types of literacies need to be shared with teachers to make them more visible.

The teachers in this study became aware of their students' literacies happening at home through reading their students' literacy stories. In fact, after reading her students' stories, Ms. M said, "So much is happening in the homes that I did not know about" (Interview 2). Learning about the multiple literacies happening in the homes through the 'literacy stories' helped the two teachers in the study move their thinking from "not knowing" to "wanting to know more" about what was going on in the homes.

The findings also stress the connections from these identified literacies from home to more formal literacies must be made explicit to teachers. The findings in Chapter Four provided many examples of these connections. In order to make the relationships clear, I provided a chart that correlated the formal literacy skills of the classroom to some specific literacy skills happening in the home (see Appendix F ). This chart created a visual presentation of how the literacies from home can provide bridges to the more formal literacies at school on a skill by skill basis. The next two charts (Appendix G) correlate the literacies found in the homes to the skills evaluated on the TPRI and the Children's Progress Monitoring. The descriptions of how literacy from home connect to formal literacy skills adds to the literature and can help pre-kindergarten teachers understand these connections and provide meaningful activities that bridge their students' learning from home to school. Furthermore, these charts can be used in professional development programs as tools to help teachers discover the many literacies existing in the homes and how they are matched to the literacies taking place in the classroom settings.

### ***Barriers for learning about home literacies***

The importance of identifying and utilizing the pre-kindergartners' literacies from home is established in the literature and supported in this study (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Dickinson & Tabor, 2001; Hull and Schultz, 2002). However, the teachers expressed concern of being able to learn about each student's literacies. Ms. M commented, "Unless you spend as much time as you did with them, it is hard to get a complete picture of their home literacies. Teachers won't be able to spend that much time" (Interview 2). Other concerns or barriers to identifying the literacies occurring at home were brought out in the data including schedules, the students' multiple home environments, and, parents' past experiences. I now discuss these barriers in more detail.

Ms. C and Ms. M both point to a lack of time and opportunity as reasons that they did not know more about their students' family literacy practices. Concern about time is supported in the literature about school and home connection programs (Simon & Epstein, 2001). Ms. M noted this when she commented, "Time. That is the hard part. It takes a lot of time to get to know the children and their parents"(Ms. M, Interview2). Ms. C explained the time difficulty for the teachers when she said, "I would like to go see them at home. I have been invited and I could see myself going over there, but it is not always possible. There is no time during school hours and it is just kind of hard since I live so far from them" (Ms. C, Interview 2).

Ms. C noted that the parents' schedules were also barriers in getting to know the families and their literacy practices. She described the difficulty for the parents to find extra time to interact with the teachers when she referred to their busy schedules and need to work. For example, Marcos' mother worked nights and slept during the day. Lily's mother worked as a home health provider often working nights, during the day, and even

over the weekends. Ms. M noted that several of her parents had more than one job and made it difficult for them to have time to visit with her.

Time and opportunity were not the only barriers mentioned to learning about families and their literacy practices. Some families are not comfortable having school personnel into their homes or coming to school. The National Education Association (Van Roekel, 2008)) states that often parents have had difficulty at school themselves and find it difficult to relate to the school. Marcos' mother was an example of a mother who overcame that barrier and fully participated in her son's school. During the field visits and interview, Marcos' mother expressed that school was hard for her and she did not like it. She asked, "Are all of the mothers young like me? I am 21" (Field notes, October 23, 2009). She also shared that she did not enjoy school, but wanted Marcos to have a different experience (Interview, November 20, 2009)

Also, the teachers pointed to the many different family situations and living arrangements as barriers to understanding their students' home literacies. Ms. M said, "There are just so many type family situations that a child might live in you don't always know who to talk to about the children. Many times children live in more than one home. Sometimes they are with their mother, sometimes with their fathers, sometimes with grandparents. The amount of time at these different homes varies during the week. Not always are the rules the same at the different houses. It creates confusion for the students and for me" (Interview 2). Ms. C also felt that different routines and literacy practices were found in the many different home environments that made up the children's lives. She noted that it was important to meet all the important people in the student's life that take care of them to truly understand their home literacy practices. "It takes more time and you have to have conferences with both of the parents, separately, but it helps you figure out a better picture of their home"(Ms. C, Interview 2).

These barriers to learning about their students' literacy practices at home that the teachers identified contribute to the current conversations in the early childhood community about the need to learn more about home literacies. These specific barriers can be addressed and solutions generated to help make the teachers successful in learning more about their students' families and family literacies.

### ***Summary of teachers' identification and use of home literacies***

This study adds to the body of information about literacies happening in the homes of pre-kindergarten students and literacy development by providing a number of specific examples of the rich family literacy practices. These examples can provide teachers with a starting point to help identify their students' literacy practices that occur at home. Furthermore, the connections to formal literacy learning made specific in this study also adds to the understanding of how bridges from home practices to school practices can be developed by teachers. Pointing out the concerns teachers have in trying to learn about their students' literacies can open conversations about how to eliminate some of these barriers and help make knowledge of home literacies more accessible.

### **Digital literacies in the homes**

This study adds to the current knowledge about young children and digital literacies by pointing out examples of the many and varied technologies that these student use every day. Gee (1996) and Street (1995) document the plethora of multimodal ways of reading and writing using technology that can be found in the homes. Examples of these literacies, such as text messaging, emailing, and blogging, are evidenced in the literature (Wohlend, 2009) and supported by the findings of this study. Furthermore, the findings add to the conversation about digital literacies and their use in school through the discussion of the teachers' reactions to learning about their students' digital abilities.

By examining the teachers' reactions to their students' digital literacies, better utilization of these literacies can be developed by teachers and other educators.

Digital literacies had a very strong presence in the home literacy environments of the six pre-kindergarteners. Each family had at least one computer, TVs, DVD players, access to the internet, cell phones and digital cameras. Four of the homes had high tech digital games such as Wii, DS, GameBoy and Playstation II. These pre-kindergarten students are truly second and third digital natives (Pensky, 2001). They have grown-up in a digital environment and for them technology is common practice. Marcos' mother made this clear when she commented that she did not know how Marcos learned to use a computer; he just did (Interview, November 20, 2009). This tacit knowledge of how to use digital technology can be built upon to provide connections from home literacies to more formal literacies at school.

However, the use of digital technology is not as present in the pre-kindergarten classrooms. The teachers were not directly asked if they used any digital technology in their classroom, but Ms. C did mention that she had computers and used them as a learning center. She used the computers for skill type activities such as letter recognition games (Interview 1).

The multiple digital literacies that their students' used at home were a surprise to the teachers. After reading the students' 'literacy stories', Ms. C commented that she did not realize that her students' had so much technology in their homes and could use it to do so many things. She said, "Marcos was very good in computer class so I could see that he had been exposed to it before" (Interview 2). She also added that it was a missed opportunity. She said that she had overlooked all the computer and game skills her students had and that she could have used them to build on in class.

Ms. M was also surprised at the variety of skills that her students had with digital technology. She commented, “I should have picked up on how important the DS was to him (Israel) when he brought it for Show and Tell” (Interview 2). She also referred to her surprise on how Israel was able to text and was even interested in communicating “that way” (Interview 2).

The teachers did not expand on the discussion of digital literacies past expressing surprise in their students’ digital literacies, and seeing them as missed opportunities. This disconnect between the multiple digital literacies I observed in the homes and the limited attention given to them by the teachers in the classroom and in their discussions about literacy practices was surprising. The teachers did not focus on adding that to their overall classroom practices. This is even more surprising since these teachers are very technologically savvy and use digital literacies themselves on a daily basis. This information can be used to help educators begin to look into using technology in real ways in the classrooms. This study points out that the students have the skills, but connections are not being made to their classroom practices.

Another contribution from this study is the knowledge that more and more students have access to technology including the internet. Through the accessibility of smart cell phones that include internet access, technology is more affordable for parents. Every home in this study had access to the internet either via computer or cell phone. Computers are available at libraries, schools, and community centers. Free internet access is available at public places such as McDonalds and grocery stores. This knowledge of access to digital technology needs to be shared with all education stakeholders to combat a previous assumption that these resources were not available to low SES families.



### ***Summary of digital Literacies***

One of the areas that this study adds to the current bank of knowledge on pre-kindergartners' home literacies is in the area of digital literacies. These pre-kindergartners are able to use technology in their homes for entertainment, communications, and acquiring knowledge. Digital literacies are a large part of their daily life. These same literacies were not as present in the classroom and in the teachers' discussion of their literacy practices. Furthermore, these findings underscore the need for the classrooms to have up-to-date technology in the classrooms for this to take place. Digital devices must be readily accessible for incidental learning and planned learning (Labbo et al., 2002). Finally, the study points out that access to internet and other digital literacies is now more accessible than before.

### **Influence of external forces on the pre-kindergarten literacy**

Contributions from this study can be seen in the findings that elaborate how external forces are influencing the teachers' definition of literacy and their literacy practices. Current researchers express concerns over the influence of federal and state policies such as NCLB on early childhood teacher's views on literacy (Teale, 2010, Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Au and Raphael, 2000). The findings from this study support this concern and provide specific examples of how the SRC grant and state initiatives influence the teachers' view on literacy and their practices.

### ***SRC's impact on teachers' practice***

This study specifically found that the SRC grant that Seam ECC was participating in was a strong influence on the teachers practice. As part of the SRC grant, CIRCLE training for the teachers was provided. CIRCLE training places a strong emphasis on developing the reading skills that have been shown to have a strong correlation to success in formal reading skills (CIRCLE, 2010). Also, the TSR certification is part of the SRC

requirements and focuses on preparing the pre-kindergarten students to be successful kindergartners.

The influence of SRC was seen in the teachers' discussion of their literacy practices. On several occasions both Ms. C and Ms. M noted that they included a particular activity because the SRC was encouraging them to do so. For example, Ms. M was adding writing to every center (Interview 1) and Ms. C was using small groups during center time to work with students who were not learning their letters (Interview 1).

Ms. C noted that the grant was not only telling her what to teach, but also how to do it. She discussed the small groups, how many read-alouds to do per day, and the amount of time that was to be spent in centers and large group activities (Interview 1). Ms. M. pointed to the assessment piece as dictating what she must teach and the children should accomplish (Interview 1). These specific examples support the concern of many early childhood educators.

The influence of the SRC grant and its requirements can be seen in how the teachers defined literacy. Ms. M said,

Literacy is...Just has to do with reading and trying to get them involved with language arts. It's getting them involved with the words, reading and retelling stories, and getting them communicating with each other and communicating with me. (Ms. M, Interview 1)

Ms. C had a similar definition for literacy. She defined literacy in the following way:

Literacy has to do with reading and writing. In pre-k, literacy is the process of learning all the pre-reading skills. It is getting the pre-k students to be more aware of what reading is, about books, and about book awareness. (Interview 1)

Both Ms. C's and Ms. M's definition of literacy focused specifically on the school-type skills associated with language arts curriculums. Using this narrow lens to view the literacy progress of their students revealed itself in the descriptions of their students' literacy skills. For example, Ms. M described Israel's literacy skills by saying,

“Israel came in knowing all of his letters—upper and lower case. He was able to recognize 17 sounds if not more. He has just come in with a lot of letter knowledge and you can tell he has been practicing those skills at home” (Interview 1). Ms. C described Sonia’s literacy skills by saying, “Sonia is able to rhyme and do other skills like counting syllables and alliteration and she is pretty good in math, but retaining letters she is difficult for her” (Interview 1). These examples of how Ms. C and Ms. M focus their definition on specific skill development supports the concern in the literature that a narrow definition of literacy is privileging academic literacies over other literacy practices (Teale et al., 2010; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Au and Raphael, 2000).

### **Complying with mandates**

Understanding the ways teachers see their role in early literacy development as being guided by grants and mandates contributes to the conversation about outside influences in teachers’ practices. The teachers did not discuss their concern over the influence of the SRC grant and its mandates—simply acknowledged the requirements of the grant and the changes it was making in their practices. They appeared to accept the requirements as just part of being a pre-kindergarten teacher. The compliance to the structure provided by these external forces offers specific examples to the literature of one way pre-kindergarten teachers are responding to the changes of the “terrain of early childhood classrooms” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009).

### **Literacy Stories as a tool**

The “literacy stories” that were developed from the data collected through observations and interviews provided a tool to use in making the students’ literacies from home more visible. The original proposal for this study did not include writing literacy stories for each of the students. At the proposal defense, modifications and suggestions to my research questions were made that concluded in adding my third research question.

This question examined the impact know their students' literacy practices happening at home would have on their views of literacy in the future. In order to provide the information to the teachers, I compiled all the literacies noted in the data into a narrative. The result of sharing the stories with the teachers was unexpected and powerful.

### ***Identifying literacies happening at home***

After reading the literacy stories, both Ms. C and Ms. M noted that they had changed their definition of literacy. Ms. C said, "I see literacy as so much more. I won't look at literacy skills the same again." In addition, after reading the stories, they began to mention multiple literacies in their discussion of their practice and their students skills. Once the teachers had expanded their definition of literacy to include more than just school-type literacies, they were able to identify many of the literacy skills that their students brought with them from home to school. Ms. M said, "There is just so much that you don't realize that is being done at home. You just need to get a feel for what the parents are doing at home with their children. You want to know what kinds of literacy things they do at home with their kids or activities that they do with their children. It gives you an idea of what they are learning at home verses what they are learning at school" (Ms. M, Interview 2). Ms. C added that it only made sense to build on what they already know. The "literacy stories" helped expand the teachers definitions of literacy to include home literacy practices. Ms. C commented that she had not thought of those activities as literacy. A similar response was made by a "knowledgeable other" (teacher) to reading the literacy stories. She commented that she had not thought of things like doing the laundry as a literacy skill, but now she did. She added that she was surprised at how many literacy skills are being learned in the homes of these children (Personal conversation, March 2010). By reading examples of the literacy skills that occur in their students' homes, teachers were able to see literacy practices in other activities in their

classrooms. They also were able to make connections from what was going on at home to the more formal literacy skills. Seeing the relationship of literacies happening at home literacies to more skill focused, formal literacy skills will expand how teachers view literacy skills and instruction. More meaningful activities can be planned using this information. Literacy stories provided one need to elaborate more here and make the connection to the implications clearer

By gaining an understanding of their students' that they had not seen in class, they began to look at how they saw literacy in general. This contributes a viable tool that can be used to help early childhood educators and researchers make all literacies more visible in the classroom. Furthermore, this tool will add to the knowledge base of teachers

### *Applying new ideas*

Ms. M and Ms. C. were very receptive to the literacy stories and drew several conclusions in favor of a wider definition of literacy. This was seen in their reactions to the "literacy stories" of their students. For example, during the second interview, Ms. C was asked if her literacy views had changed after reading literacy stories she said, "I did not realize that in order to understand a student's literacy skills you must include their home literacies to get the true picture of what they know. I see literacy in a whole new way" (Interview 2).

Both Ms. C and Ms. M noted that once they expanded their definition of literacy to include more than just school-type literacies, they were able to identify many of the literacy skills that their students brought with them to school. Ms. M said,

You just need to get a feel for what the parents are doing at home with their children. You want to know what kinds of literacy things they do at home with their kids or activities that they do with their children. It gives you an idea of what they are learning at home verses what they are learning at school" fix. (Ms. M, Interview 2)

The teachers also realized that they had intuitively been providing opportunities for students. Ms. C felt that knowing the students' literacy practices taking place in their homes better would be her first step to providing activities that would take what they did at home and use it at school. Both she and Ms. M commented on how they would utilize learning centers to provide places for students to share their literacies from home.

The teachers adopted the wider definition of literacy quickly and began to make plans on how they would utilize it. In fact Ms. M. began to add to the definition in specifics from her classroom. She said,

The pre-kindergarteners will take what they are learning at home and display it in the classroom. They will act out the different things that they are doing at home with their parents in school. They will also act out at home what they are learning in the play centers and in the writing center and reading books. (Interview 2)

Both Ms. M and Ms. C quickly adopted a wider definition of literacy and generalized it to their teaching practice.

### ***Summary of contributions of literacy stories***

The literacy stories provide multiple examples of literacy practices. Furthermore, connections were easily made since these stories were about their own students who they worked with daily. Ms. M. expressed this by saying that the stories added "bits and pieces" of information that helped her understand her students better. The teachers' quick response to the information provided by the stories show how powerful these narratives were in this study. Although not part of the original proposal, the writing of these 'literacy stories' resulted in providing a powerful tool to help teachers understand multiple literacy practices. This contribution to research on literacies occurring in the homes of pre-kindergarten students will help other early childhood educators expand their knowledge of their students literacy practices. Sharing student's literacy practices happening at home through a narrative provides an example of a tool that can be used in

learning about their other student's literacy skills. Parents could develop their own literacy stories as part of a home connection project or as a family classroom project guided by the teachers. Using the tool of the literacy story, teachers can include literacy practice questions during their regular conferences and on their information questionnaire. Combining the various information gathered about each student's literacies can work toward teachers being able to understand each of their students' unique "literacy story."

### **Summary of Contributions**

The findings from this study offers many contributions to the understanding of home literacies and how teachers can identify and utilize them. Examples contradicting the misperception that little or no literacy learning is not taking place in the homes of LSES pre-kindergartners were contributed by this study to the current literature. The study provided rich descriptions of many varied literacies observed in the pre-kindergartners homes. The misperception that specific school-type literacies such as learning letters and writing the alphabet are not happening in these homes was also contradicted. The idea that the lines between the perceived dichotomy of home literacies and school literacies are blurring was evidenced in the homes of these pre-kindergartners. Furthermore, this move from home verses school possibly could result in a change from using the terms home literacy and school-type literacies present in the current literature to terms more focused on domains and uses as seen in the NLS concepts. Using literacies happening in the home and literacies happening at school were the terms that were used in the latter part of the study to mark this change in thinking.

The study also points to the need to also bring literacies that develop and occur at home into the classroom. Furthermore, through the students' 'literacy stories' and the discussion of their literacy events and practices happening at home, specific examples are

added to the literature to provide basic frameworks for recognizing literacies happening in the homes of the students and their connections to literacies happening at school. The power of using the tool of the ‘literacy stories’ to help make the students’ literacies visible to the teachers and impact their views on literacy was discussed. Providing these “literacy stories” will add to the current conversations among early childhood educators about valuing all literacy practices. This study also specifically adds to the literature on the digital literacies that the pre-kindergartners are bringing with them to school and the underutilization of these skills at school. Finally, the influences of outside or external forces on the teachers’ literacy practice supports the concerns of many educators about the change in early childhood curriculums in reaction to federal and state mandates. These multiple contributions from this study create implications for the early childhood educators including teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and administrators. The next section will explore those implications.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Pressure is being felt by early childhood educators to ensure that all children experience “positive learning outcomes” in school (Bredekamp in Dickson & Tabors, 2001). Specifically, NCLB (2001) and state standards (TEA, 2009) require children to be reading on level by third grade. Examining literacy through the contexts of the students’ homes and their teachers’ literacy practices yielded information that has implications for , teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers as they strive to meet these demands. I now will discuss the implications that this study offers for each of these groups. My hope is that these recommendations provide insights to making the literacy practices that occur in the homes of the pre-kindergartners visible in school and utilizing them as building blocks for other literacies



## **Teachers**

This study offers several recommendations for all early childhood teachers and specifically for pre-kindergarten teachers in the public school setting. Teachers are being held accountable for insuring the success of all of their students. Mandates and requirements coming from various sources such as grants, curriculums, and assessment instruments (TPRI, CPM) present specific views and ideas. Teachers can learn from this study that it is important to look critically at these views and expand upon the concepts and ideas that are presented by these sources. The example of SRC using a narrow definition of literacy which was limiting the scope of the teachers' instruction underscores the importance of teachers being critical learners. Not only do teachers need to examine carefully the information provided by the mandated curriculum, but they must also be open to new ideas. Ms. M. and Ms. C provide examples of being open to new information and ideas. After reading the students' literacy stories, the teachers begin to rethink some of their ideas on what literacy was and widened their definition of literacy to encompass more socially constructed, informal literacies. In doing so, the teachers immediately realized that they needed to learn more about their students and their families. Although, they had good relationships with their families and knew much about them, they were still aware of the need to gain further knowledge about their students' literacy practices at home and in the community. In general, teachers must develop ways in which they can learn about their students' literacy practices at home..

This study adds to existing literature on students' multiple literacies and provides a variety of examples that can help teachers identify the literacies happening in the homes of their students. Teachers can expand on their current practices such as conferences, surveys, show-n-tell, and holding conversations with parents and students actively listening for clues about the literacies occurring at home. They can also advocate for

time and opportunities to be built into the school day allow for teacher-family interactions.

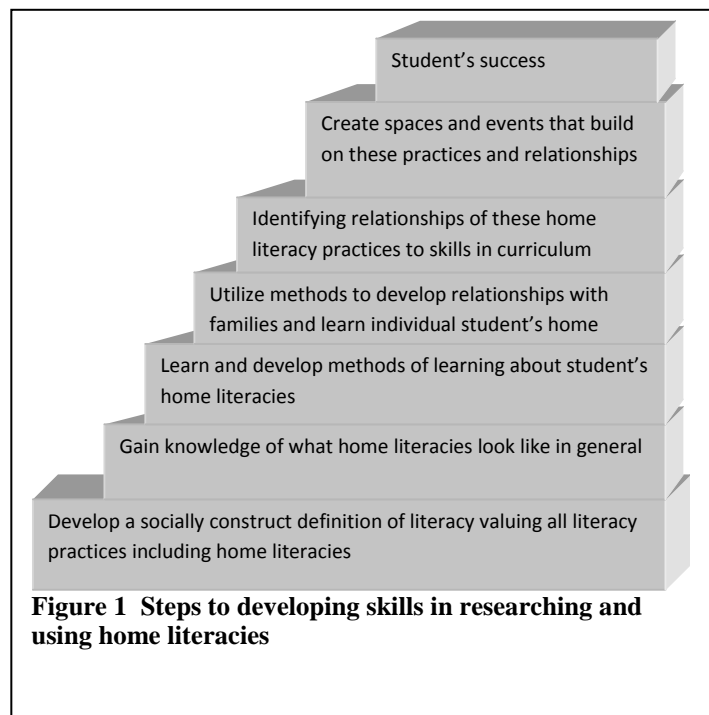
The importance of teachers widening their literacy definition to include the socio-constructed literacy skills and practices found in the home is necessary for them to be able to build upon their existing knowledge to meet the demanding accountability standards of today's schools.

### **Implications for Teacher Educators**

Teachers and teacher candidates must be prepared to build on their students' existing knowledge to provide meaningful experiences for their students (Moll et al.,) Teachers and teacher candidates must be informed about how to make connections with parents and their students' communities (Rodriquez-Brown, 2009). As the diversity in our classrooms continues to grow, the importance of being able to capitalize on each students' abilities will also grow. This requires that teacher educators must include information on the multiple literacies that are occur in the homes of pre-kindergarten students and how to make connections with families in their plan of instruction. Starting with widening the definition of literacy and moving away from the idea of the dichotomy of in-school and out-of-school experiences to collaborated literacies as discussed previously, would be a first step.

Figure 1 shows one suggestion for steps that staff developers and teacher educators must include in the development of teachers who can successfully build bridges from home to school through literacy practices. These suggested steps begins with developing a wide definition of literacy that values the literacies happening in the homes, then focuses on learning about home literacies and what they look like. Helping teachers develop methods to learn about these practices and connect them to the curriculum must be included in this process. Finally helping the teachers learn how to create spaces in

their classrooms where all literacies are valued and used to build new knowledge culminating in the students' success in the classroom. These steps emerged from the way Ms. M. and Ms. C reacted to their literacy stories. They learned about the multiple literacies happening in their students' homes and subsequently developed a wider definition of literacy from the stories. Their discussions, after reading the stories, included new ways to find out about the literacies happening in their students' homes and the connections they could make. Finally they acknowledge the many literacy bridges that they had made, but not realized.



Teacher educators must also include how to interact with parents and how to learn about the home literacies. Also, learning about creating spaces for students to utilize these combined literacies will give teachers another tool for developing literacy.

## **Implications for Policymakers**

Current education policies stress the importance of having all students reading on grade level by the third grade (NCLB, 2001). The effects of this policy reaches the pre-kindergarten classroom through what Hatch (2002) terms as “an ‘accountability shove down’ which threatens the integrity of early childhood professionals and the quality of educational experiences for young children” (p. 461). Examples of the quality of experiences for young children being compromised can be seen in the skill development focus of the SRC. This study also holds that by doing so, one literacy is being valued over all the other literacies limiting the learning opportunities for the students.

Policy makers are concentrating on the outcomes, being on level by third grade, and the process of how students will get there—not comprehending the hazards of the narrow curriculum. Students from non-mainstream family often follow a different process to achieve the same goals. This study points out how literacies from home can make connects from to school and help students build on their existing literacies if given opportunities. Policy makers must look at providing opportunities for all children by adjusting the standards to be more encompassing of multiple literacies and create an environment that encourages teachers to broaden their literacy perspectives, too. As policymakers write and rewrite the standard for pre-k that are aligned to K-12 academic standards mandated by the GSGS and Head Start Reauthorization Act, they must also consider the developmental, social, and cultural needs of the students. State policy makers must also relook at the definitions and mandates of their initiative such as the TSR certification to insure that multiple literacies are incorporated to provide learning opportunities that are accessible by all students

One of the major impacts of the GSGS and Head Start Reauthorization Act is mandate for early childhood programs, including pre-kindergarten programs, to develop

standards that align with the K-12 academic standards. Emphasis has been placed on developing specific standards that all pre-kindergarten children must meet to be considered academically successful in language, literacy, and math (Neuman & Roskos, 2005).

An expanded definition of literacy needs to be acknowledged by those developing the standards and subsequent teaching materials. Teale, et al. (2010) points to NELP as a driving force in the direction that emergent literacy is going. They stress that NELP's narrow focus on skill development in pre-school literacy creates a concern for young children's literacy development. Teale et al.'s (2010) concern is that early literacy instruction, based on NELP's narrow definition of literacy, will be inappropriate and skill driven.

### **Implications for Administrators**

The need for teachers to learn about all of their students' literacy practices in order to help students meet the standards put forth in the classrooms supports the current literature and offers implications for administrators both at the district level and the campus level (Genishi & Tyson, 2009). These have several implications for administrators at the district level and the school level .

First, administrators must acknowledge the multiple literacies and provide opportunities for their teachers to learn about their the literacies that are occurring in their students' homes. Ms. M and Ms. C provide examples of the importance of knowing these literacy practices to build bridges from home to school. For example, Ms. C said, "I wish I would have known that (about his digital literacies) at the beginning; I could have used it" (Interview 2). She added, "I think it is important to find out where they (the students are) started and where their foundation came from" (Interview 2). Opportunities for home-school connections must be systemically included in the early childhood

programs of schools. Opportunities for two-way connections must be provided (Marsh, 2003; Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). Holding semi-annual conferences and sending home homework and calendars are not enough to develop the meaningful connections that need to be made (Brown-Rodriguez, 2010). Including time for home visits, sharing activities, and including parents as decision makers must be included in the operating procedures of the schools. Although, these requests for time might originate with the teacher they must be developed at the local and state level to become viable. As Ms. M and Ms. C both stated, they wanted to be involved with their parents, but having to do so on their own private time makes it difficult. Including opportunities for connections with in the teachers' work time is important to learning about the many literacies taking place in the students' homes. This may be accomplished by adding personnel that work within the classrooms regularly so that duties can be shared allowing one of the teachers to make visits to students' homes. Parent facilitators can be added to the pre-kindergarten team that work different hours so that they can make home visits similar to mine and share information with the other members of the team. Student holidays can be worked into the calendar by district administrators to provide opportunities for parents and teachers to interact. These opportunities must be part of school policies in order to be an integral part of the pre-kindergarten program.

This study has implications for budgeting, for personnel as mentioned above, and for technology. Recently a colleague responded to me when I comment on her being so smart for using a digital sign up sheer saying, "Oh that's not smart, I am just so twenty-ten" (Personal conversation, October 2010). I immediately made the connection to my research that the homes in the study were so "twenty-ten" and the classrooms so 1999. Administrators must allocate funds to upgrade the classrooms in order to capitalize on the many digital literacies that were present in the study. Making technology for pre-

kindergarten a priority in the campus documents such as the Campus Improvement Plan will make sure funds are allocated. Writing grants for technology hardware and software are also a way to for administrators to acquire technology. Partnerships with companies often provide what they consider outdated equipment but in reality is only a year old.

### **Summary**

Teachers, teacher educators, administration and policy makers must all work together to ensure that all students' literacies are valued and built upon. This is starts with expanding understandings about literacy to move away from a skill-driven definition to one that reflects the socially constructed nature of literacy including acknowledging multiple literacies (Street, 2003). Commitments of time and money need to be made to make sure that home literacies are identified and utilized by teachers to build bridges to more formal learning. I now turn to the limitations of this study.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY**

The qualitative case study design and scope of this research limit these findings (Yin, 2003). However, this research design was able to provide information about the many literacies happening in the students' homes and their home literacies and teachers' practices. Each case was unique, be it the literacies of the children or the literacy practices of the teachers. Qualitative case study method of research offered the opportunity of studying a common case and bringing out the rich, uncommon data (Wolcott, 1990). Among the limitations of this study were the questions of bias because of the selection of participants and my position as the researcher. Also, the number of participants and the amount of time that was spent collecting data limits the generalizations that can be made from the study. This section looks closely at these limitations.

## **Bias**

One limitation of the current study was the possibility of bias. Two areas of concern were the selection of the participants and the researcher's position in the school where the study was conducted.

### ***Selection of participants***

The selection of participants was dependent upon volunteers. The teachers who volunteered were teachers who were eager to learn and willing to try new things. They also had been teaching less than five years. The teachers' dispositions which were possibly responsible for their volunteering, may have been responsible for the teachers being open to the literacy stories and expanding their definition of literacy to include multiple literacy practices.

Similarly the parents who attended the teacher meetings and heard the request for volunteers were already involved in their students' schooling. Those that followed through and signed up to participate were comfortable coming to school and participating in school activities. Self-selection for the study may have produced more similarities than if the participants had been chosen randomly. Stake (1995), commenting on sample selections, states that one of the first criteria for the qualitative researcher is to maximize what we can learn. He points out that time is always limited and if we can we need to pick cases which are "easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry" (p. 4). Haney and Hill (2004) noted similar limitations in their study since parents choosing to participate conceivably would be parents interested in literacy and therefore engaging in more home literacy practices. However, unlike Haney & Hill's study whose participants were a homogeneous group in regards to parent education and race, the families in this study were very diverse. Five of the six families self-reported that their children qualified for pre-kindergarten through the income requirements. They were therefore considered at-



risk students. The age of the parents ranged from 22 to 40. Single parent families, traditional families, and blended families were represented in the group of participants. The families represented various ethnicities and cultures as well as parents who were second language learners.

### ***Researcher's position***

Bias from my position in the school must be considered. Lincoln (1995) points out that all research is representative of the position or standpoint of the author. Research takes place within a specific community and the researcher should be able to know the community well enough to link the results to the community (Mertins, 2005). Efforts were made to make sure that my position did not influence the teachers or parents above what any researcher's presence would. Assurances were made that all information was confidential and pseudonyms would be used. Furthermore, I removed myself from supervision of the teachers and did not participate in literacy staff developments for two years. Anderson and Jones (2000), in their study of site-based administrator research, argue that administrators doing site-based research are providing valuable, practical information to their respective fields. They go on to caution that efforts must be made to insure rigor and objectivity. Member checking and discussions with "knowledgeable others" were used to address these issues. Furthermore, I have included thick descriptions in Chapters Four and Five as means of supporting the findings to overcome any bias from my position as researcher. Although I was not these teachers' supervisor, I was the administrator of the school. The implication might be made that they would try to say or do what I had anticipated or desired. My role in the school was not that of a typical principal. Having been a teacher for over 30 years and just recently out of the classroom, I was more of a lead teacher. The teachers were very open and forthcoming in their answers.

Considering my position in the school and interactions with the families must also be addressed. As in Moll 's (2005) Funds of Knowledge project, the teachers visited in their students homes' and were able to gather meaningful information. My visits to the homes and activities resulted in the collection of rich data.

Stake (1995) points out that maximizing time is important in qualitative research. Having relationships with the families worked to an advantage both in time and my ability to accommodate both the families schedules. Being at the school made it easy to set up appointments and make changes to meet the parents' schedules. Three of the families had known me the year before and three were new to the school. Interactions with the families appeared to be no different than the previous years with the parents I knew or from many of the parents at the school. In fact, one parent was very vocal about her dislike of the office staff and some of the rules and procedures of the school.

Considering my position in the school and interactions with the pre-kindergartners themselves must also be considered. The students were eager to interact with me on the first visit. I had a literacy bag to create those interactions. On subsequent visits, they were not as intrigued by me and continued with their activities. My coming in and out of their classrooms while they continued to play, listen, or work on projects seemed to transfer to my visits in their homes. They greeted me and then went on. Their behavior was modeled by the families. They would acknowledge me, interacted occasionally, make comments or ask questions but mostly continued with what they were doing.

### **Size and length of study**

The number of students and teachers that participated in the study was small with only six families and two teachers. The data acquired from the study was rich in descriptions of literacies practices that occur in the homes which resulted in unique "literacy stories" for the students. These stories provided information to the teachers that

were instrumental in helping them expand their definition of literacy. Data from the teachers provided opportunity. The data mirrored many of the results found in the current research (Rodriquez-Brown, 2009; Moll, et al., 2005).

Although many hours were spent with the teachers, students and their families, more could be learned if more time would have been spent observing literacies practices in the students' homes and discussing literacy practices with the teachers. Although the study was done over nine months, expanding the study over a longer period would have allowed for more observations overall and specifically observations in different environments such as baseball, summer activities, and the time just before school starts.

These limitations point to future inquiry that needs to be done. Not only expanding the collection of data, but also expanding the domains that where the students' literacies take place needs to occur. The next section looks into these areas of further study.

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY**

Although this study provided examples of many literacy practices in the homes of the pre-kindergarteners families as well as insights into teachers' literacy practices it also raised questions and areas that need further study. Although many possibilities for further study developed from this dissertation, I will discuss four specific areas to study—expand duration and contexts of the study and including more contexts, the literacies of families, longitudinal study of these students' success in kindergarten, and the impact of external sources on teacher' practice and examining mismatch of digital literacies in the home and school.

##### ***Home literacy study expanded***

Examining the literacies happening in the homes needs to be expanded over a longer period of time and in different contexts. This study did not examine family

literacy practices during all of the natural timeframes of the year such as all holidays and summer vacation. The actual collection of data from the families was limited to the three months from October to January. Even though visits took place at McDonald's, church, and Wal-Mart, there were many other contexts that need to be examined including baseball games, and family outings,

Several children in the study spent time in other home contexts. For example, Jeffrey's family was a blended family where he shared his time between his mother's home and that of his father. Marcos also spent much of his time at his grandmother's house. The literacy practices in these additional home settings were not examined. The impact of differing home contexts for the same child would be an area of further study.

Examining how the literacy practices occurring at home changed as the children progress through school would be important to examine. Examining how these literacy practices change in relation to the progress of the students through school would add to the literature and help provide teachers with information on the literacy practices of different grade levels.

### ***Success in kindergarten***

Examining the success of the students in kindergarten would add to the literature. Both Ms. M and Ms. C engaged in many activities to improve their students' success in kindergarten. Following these six students through their kindergarten year looking specifically at their TPRI scores and CPM scores which were correlated to their language practices happening at home in chapter 4 would add another level of understanding to the impact of students' individual literacies on literacy skill achievement. Second, following the literacies practices of the families to see if they stay similar to the ones in their pre-kindergarten years or if they adapt or alter to meet the expectations of the subsequent grades.

### ***External forces***

The impact of the SRC grant and the Pre-K guidelines was apparent in the data from the teachers. The expectations in the grant and guidelines were derived from the current demands of high stakes testing and current information of specific skills that are predictors of future success in reading (Roskos et al., 2003). Further research on the impact of these types of federal and state initiatives on other pre-kindergarten teachers literacy practices needs to be conducted. Expanding this inquiry to kindergarten teachers would add to the knowledge base on early literacy development.

Furthermore, examining how these two teachers, Ms. C and Ms. M use their expanded definition of literacy next year would provide information on the sustainability of their new concepts of literacy under the ongoing pressure of external forces. The question rises that with this curricula push, can teachers embrace the idea of co-constructed literacies between the home and school.

Digital literacies need more research. The mismatch that was seen between these pre-kindergartner's digital use at home and at school needs to be further examined. Specifically, the reasons that this mismatch exists should be studied looking at policy, skills, time constraints, and lack of equipment.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

In collecting data from the pre-kindergartners, their families, and their teachers, I developed a new sense of awe in what happens during the pre-kindergarten year. Each of the students was capable, independent thinkers and doers. They were in a school setting that was extremely demanding. They were being asked, many for the first time, to connect two different worlds—not only in literacy practices, but in many more areas of their life.

The families of the students were supportive of the school and wanted their children to develop all the necessary skills to make them successful. The homes were filled with rich literacy practices—many more than I anticipated. There were the typical literacy tools and activities, but there was so much more. The digital literacy development of the students surprised me. DSs, Wii's, computers, blogs, text messages, cell phones, DVD players were used every day to communicate and learn. Schedules and routines were common in homes. The families worked together to get things done, and literacy practices developed as they did.

Teachers are under a great deal of pressure to make sure that their students succeed academically. This pressure comes from many different directions; from grant (SRC) requirements, the TSR certificate demand, Seam ISD, parents, next years' teachers, and even from themselves. Taking twenty-two pre-kindergarteners through the rigorous curriculum set out by the school and the SRC grant was an overwhelming task, and the teachers were doing it without questioning. Participating in this study, however, led these teachers to begin developing their own ideas outside of these mandates. They wanted to know more and learn more about their students. They valued their relationships with the families already, but a new sense of importance on making connections evolved.

Finally, the students' literacy stories were powerful not only in reading the stories, but in my writing them. Taking the data collected from the families on their literacy practices and weaving it into a story that provided a realistic picture of the families' literacy practices made me look deeper into how literacy skills develop. What foundational skills were important to later more formal literacy development? The deeper I looked into literacy practices in the homes, the more there were. These families

are continually involved in literacy development. These literacies needed to be made visible first to me so that I could share that with the early childhood community.

The reactions from sharing the stories with the teachers, families, fellow graduate students and colleagues provided me with interesting observations. Several colleagues commented that they did not think of “these as literacy” before they read the stories, but now they see it. The “now I see it” or the “ah-ha moment” is what I hope to continue to develop.

## **Appendices**



## **Appendix A: Parent Interview Protocol**

### **Parent Interview Protocol**

This interview is voluntary and you can refuse to answer the questions or stop any time you wish. If you want to stop participating in the interview that will be fine and there will be no negative consequences. Everything you say is confidential and no one other than me will know what you have said. If you have any questions you can ask me anytime. With your permission, I would like to record this interview.

Tell me a little bit about \_\_\_\_\_..

#### **Social-Interactional**

Tell me about some of the activities that you and your child like to do together.

What does your child like to do alone?

What are your child's favorite toys?

#### **Entertainment**

Tell me what kind of electronic games your child plays with if any. DVDs? How does he/she use them?

#### **Daily living/Routines/patterns**

Tell me about some typical times and events at your home. a typical afternoon, a typical Saturday? Sunday? Holidays?

Tell me about a typical time right before going to bed.

Do you have any routines in your day like meal time or bedtime where you do the same things almost every time? Can you explain them to me?

#### **Ownership/announcement**

Does \_\_\_\_ like to write his name or draw pictures on things to let you know it is his?

Does he/she like to look at pictures or scrapbooks?

#### **Educational/school-type**

What activities do you give your child when you want him to wait quietly like in church or a restaurant?

Does your child play school? What kinds of things does he/she play?

**Environmental**

What errands or chores does your child do that involves “reading”? Writing or drawing? Talking?

What other activities do you and/or your child do that involves reading and writing?

How do you use reading and writing at home? In your job? In your daily life?

**School directed**

What kind of work do your children bring home from school? What do you think about this work? What do you do with it?

Have you been involved in any literacy activities or projects at school? How did those go? Were they fun, meaningful, worth attending?

What kinds of things does the school stress as important literacy activities for you and your family to do? Do you agree?

What does \_\_\_\_’s teacher say about reading and writing? How does she say \_\_\_\_\_ is doing in school?

What does your child tell you about school? About reading? About writing? About his/her friends? About his teachers?

**Connections**

Do you see a connection between the literacy skills your child participates in at home and the ones at school? Do you think that the literacy activities you do at home help with the activities he/she does at school?

Did you see a connection between your home activities and your school activities when you were in school?

How well do you think your child’s teacher knows or understands your child? What has the teacher done to get to know you and your child?

**General**

If you had more time to spend with your child, what would you like to do with him/her?

What do you think it takes for a student to be successful in school?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your child or their activities?

## **Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol**

### **Interview Teacher Protocol**

This interview is voluntary and you can refuse to answer the questions or stop any time you wish. If you want to stop participating in the interview that will be fine and there will be no negative consequences. Everything you say is confidential and no one other than me will know what you have said. If you have any questions you can ask me anytime. With your permission, I would like to record this interview.

#### **Classroom**

Tell me about your classroom and some of the activities that you and your students enjoy doing.

#### **Specific understanding**

What does the term literacy mean to you? Can you put that into a definition? Give me some examples.

What importance do you place on literacy? Why?

What helped you develop these ideas about literacy? Have these ideas changed over your career?

#### **Practice**

What ways do you facilitate literacy development in your classroom?

Which of these seems to be the most successful? For everyone? For specific children? Who?

Tell me about how you incorporate books into your classroom?

Tell me how you incorporate writing, reading, and language in your classroom.

#### **Match/mismatch**

How do the pre-k guidelines fit into your ideas about literacy? What impact have they had on your teaching?

How do these standards match your students' abilities at the beginning of the year?

Are there other factors that influence your ideas on literacy or your methods of incorporating literacy in your classroom? (District demands, grants, school demands, other teachers)

**Literacies brought with them**

What literacies do the students come to school with? In general? Specific to your target student

Do these differ from the literacy skills that you teach? Are they the same?

How do these literacies help them at school?

How do you know about these literacies?

What do you do with this understanding?

**Achievement**

What do you think it takes for a student to be successful in school?

Let's talk about (focus student).

**Identification**

Tell me about (focus student)'s home activities? How did you find this out?

How have you incorporated these skills into the classroom?

What literacy skills does (focus student) excel at?

What literacy activities does (focus student) like to do?

**Home/school connection**

Have you sent home literacy activities or shared activities with the parents? Tell me about those?

Have the parents shared any activities or literacy events from home with the class or with you specifically?

What ways does (focus student)'s family support the school? What ways does (focus student)'s family add to their literacy development?

How successful is (focus student) in your classroom? How successful to you see (focus student) being next year and then on into first grade?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about (focus student)?

**Second Interview****General**

What did you think about the information I shared with you about \_\_\_\_\_'s home literacies?

Were they what you had expected?

Where there any surprises?

Do you see using this information in your educational planning for the student? How?

## Appendix C: Parent Consent Form

Parent Consent form

IRB 2009-06-0035

**Title: Literacy practice in the homes of prekindergarten students: Identification, Teacher knowledge of home literacies, and implications for their practice.**

**Conducted By:**

Jill Scott, Doctoral Student  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Early Childhood Education  
[jillascott@aol.com](mailto:jillascott@aol.com)  
361-779-9091

Christopher P. Brown, Assistant Professor  
Department Curriculum and Instruction  
Early Childhood Education  
[cpbrown@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:cpbrown@mail.utexas.edu)  
512-232-2288

**Invitation to participate:**

You are invited to participate in a study about the different literacies that pre-kindergarten children bring with them to school and how they are used to develop additional literacy skills. This form provides you with information about the study. As the person in charge of this research, I will also describe this study to you and address questions you may have. Before you decide whether or not to participate, please read the information below and let me know if there is anything you don't understand. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time by simply telling me.

**The purpose of this study is to** examine the literacy events and practices that pre-kindergarten students engage in at home and school and how teachers use their understanding of literacy to help students build on these skills. Your participation in the observations and interview will help me identify these literacy practices.

Should you choose to participate, your responses will be kept entirely confidential. They will not be attached in any way to this form, nor will they have any identifying information attached to them.

**If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete one interview and allow me to observe literacy practices in your home or other community settings at least four times, over approximately two months. You, as the participant, will choose the day(s), time(s), and places of the observation(s) and interview. We will agree upon a location at least twenty-four hours prior to the observation. I will not show up unannounced.**

**Total estimated time to participate** about 12 hours over a two month period.

**Risks and Benefits of participation:**

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in the study. The risk associated with this study is no greater than everyday life. The benefits of being in the study include being able to add to the information that teachers have about literacy practices that occur in homes of pre-kindergarten students regularly. This information can be used to help teachers understand literacy practices and they can therefore build on this information to help students develop new literacy skills.

**Compensation:**

**There is no compensation for your participation in this study.**

**Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:**

**The interview will be audio taped. In order to provide confidentiality and protect your privacy:**

- **tapes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them;**
- **tapes will be kept in a secure place (e.g., a locked file cabinet in the investigator's office);**
- **tapes will be heard or viewed only for research purposes by the investigator and his or her associates;**
- **tapes will be erased after they are transcribed or coded.**

**The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.**

The **records** of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the **confidentiality** of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

**It is important to note that according to the Texas Family Code 265, if the researcher(s) should observe child or elder abuse, confidentiality will be broken. The state law requires the reporting of abuse to relevant agencies such as Child Protective Services or the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.**

**Contacts and Questions:**

**If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a**

research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (512) 232-2685 or the Office of Research Support at (512) 471-8871 or email: [orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
	Date: _____	

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent**

**Signature of Investigator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D: Teacher Consent Form

Teacher Consent form

IRB 2009-06-0035

**Title: Literacy practice in the homes of prekindergarten students: Identification, Teacher knowledge of home literacies, and implications for their practice.**

**Conducted By:**

Jill Scott, Doctoral Student  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Early Childhood Education  
[jillascott@aol.com](mailto:jillascott@aol.com)  
361-779-9091

**Christopher P. Brown, Assistant Professor**  
**Department Curriculum and Instruction**  
**Early Childhood Education**  
[cpbrown@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:cpbrown@mail.utexas.edu)  
**512-232-2288**

### **Invitation to participate:**

You are invited to participate in a study about the different literacies that pre-kindergarten children bring with them to school and how they are used to develop additional literacy skills. This form provides you with information about the study. As the person in charge of this research, I will also describe this study to you and address questions you may have. Before you decide whether or not to participate, please read the information below and let me know if there is anything you don't understand. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time by simply telling me.

**The purpose of this study is to** examine the literacy events and practices that pre-kindergarten students engage in at home and school and how teachers use their understanding of literacy to help students build on these skills. Your participation in the interview will help me identify these literacy practices.

**Should you choose to participate, your responses will be kept entirely confidential. They will not be attached in any way to this form, nor will they have any identifying information attached to them.**

**If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked you to complete two interviews.**

**Total estimated time to participate** about 2 hours.

### **Risks and Benefits of participation:**

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in the study. The risk associated with this study is no greater than everyday life. The benefits of being in the study include being able to add to the information that teachers have about literacy practices that occur in homes of pre-kindergarten students regularly. This information can be used to help teachers understand literacy practices and they can therefore build on this information to help students develop new literacy skills.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

**Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:**

**The interview will be audio taped. In order to provide confidentiality and protect your privacy:**

- **tapes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them;**
- **tapes will be kept in a secure place (e.g., a locked file cabinet in the investigator's office);**
- **tapes will be heard or viewed only for research purposes by the investigator and his or her associates;**
- **tapes will be erased after they are transcribed or coded.**

**The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.**

The **records** of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the **confidentiality** of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later or want additional information, contact us (see phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact **Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair of UT Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 232-2685.**

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent**

**Signature of Investigator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix E: Types of Literacies seen in the home by categories

Relationship Literacies							
		Israel	Jeffrey	Lily	Marcos	Robin	Sonia
Scaffolding	With siblings	X		X		X	X
	With other family members	X	X	X	X	X	X
Play	Games	X			X	X	X
	Role playing	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Playing school	X		X		X	X
Support	Showing student work	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Special awards	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Relationship	X	X	X	X	X	X
Routine Literacies							
Household Daily Routines	Chores	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Errands	X	X				
After School Routine Literacies	Backpacks	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Snacks		X	X	X	X	X
Mealtime	Preparing		X	X			
	Cooking	X	X	X		X	X
	Conversation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bedtime	Bedtime routines	X	X	X	X	X	X
Digital Literacies							
Communication through digital technology	Computers	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Cell phones	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Cameras and other digital				X		
	Email	X	X			X	X
	Texting	X			X		
	Blogs					X	
	DS	X			X		X

Entertainment	DVD	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Television	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Games	X	X		X	X	X
Pop Culture		X	X	X	X	X	X
School-type Literacies							
Storybook reading		X	X	X	X	X	X
Opportunities & Materials	Computers & Books	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Writing & Drawing Materials	X	X	X	X	X	X
Direct Teaching	Homework	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Paper and Pencil	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Drill	X	X	X	X	X	X

## Appendix F: Correlation of Home Literacies with Skills

Additional Literacy Skills	Classifying	Details	Enjoyment of	Words & symbol	Use of symbols	Sequencing	Observation skills	Thoughts on paper	Conventions of print	Questions	Print interaction	Points of view	Literacy values	Confidence	Following	Attention Span	Independence	Problem Solving	Decision making	Language skills	Turn taking &	Social interactions
	Relationship Literacies																					
	Scaffolding																					
	Siblings	X		X	X	X	X		X	X										X		
	Family members	X	X			X			X	X										X		
	Play			X				X												X		
	Games	X	X	X	X			X	X	X										X		
	Dramatic play	X	X	X				X		X										X		
	Support	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X										X		
	Student work	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							X		
	Special awards	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X							X		
	Relationships	X		X	X		X		X	X												
Routines literacies																						
Household																						
Chores	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X								X		
Errands	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X								X		
After school																						
Backpacks	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X								X		
Snack	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X								X		

Mealtime routines																						
Responsibilities	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X					X					X			
Conversation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X								X			
Bedtime routines	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							X			
Digital Literacies																						
Communication																						
Computers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Cell phones	X	X	X	X		X		X	X				X					X		X		
Cameras & others	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X			X	X					X		
Entertainment																						
DVD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Television	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Games	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pop Culture	X	X	X	X		X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		
School-type Literacies																						
Storybook reading	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Opportunities & Materials																						
Computers/Books	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Writing & Drawing			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Direct teaching																						
Homework	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Paper & pencil	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Drill	X	X	X			X	X	X				X		X		X	X	X	X	X		

### Appendix G: Correlation of Home Literacies with Children's Progress Monitoring and TPRI

Skills from Children's Progress Assessment (Pre-k)	Listening Skills			Reading			Phonics and Writing		Phonemic Awareness		
Home Literacy Practices and Activities	Comprehension	Skills	Comprehension	Name Fluency	Concepts of Print – Text	Concepts of Print -	Letter ID	Letter sound	Rhyming	Blending/compound	Initial sounds
Relationship Literacies											
Scaffolding											
Siblings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Family members	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Play											
Games	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dramatic play	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Support											
Student work											
Special awards											
Teacher relationships											
Routine Literacies											
Household											
Chores	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Errands	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X
After School											
Back packs and folders	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
Snacks	X	X	X								

Mealtime Routines	X		X								
Responsibility & participation	X	X	X				X				
Conversation											
Bedtime Routines	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Digital Literacies											
Communication											
Computers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Cell phones	X	X	X	X	X						
Cameras & others				X	X						
Entertainment											
DVD	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Television	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Games	X	X	X	X	X						
Pop Culture											
School-type Literacies											
Storybook reading	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Opportunities & Materials											
Computers & Books	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Writing and Drawing Materials				X	X	X	X				
Direct Teaching											
Homework	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Paper and Pencil	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Drill				X	X		X	X	X	X	X



TPRI	Rhyming	Blending word parts	Blending Phonemes	Deleting initial consonants	Deleting final consonants	Letter Recognition	Letter to sound linking	Comprehension
Relationship Literacies								
Scaffolding								
Siblings	X		X	X	X	X		X
Family members	X	X			X			X
Play								
Games	X	X	X	X			X	X
Dramatic play	X	X	X				X	
Support								
Student work	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Special awards	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Relationships	X		X	X		X		
Routine Literacies								
Household								
Chores					X	X	X	X
Errands					X	X	X	X
After school								
Backpacks	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Snack	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Meal time routines								
Responsibilities	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Conversation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bedtime routines	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Digital Literacies								
Communication								
Computers	X			X	X	X	X	X
Cell phones								X
Cameras & others						X		
Entertainment								
DVD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Television	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Games	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Pop Culture		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Storybook reading	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Opportunities & Materials								
Computers/Books	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Writing & Drawing		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Direct teaching	X							
Homework	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Paper & pencil				X	X	X	X	
Drill	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

## **Appendix H: Israel's Literacy Story**

### **Israel and his family**

Israel is a five year old pre-kindergarten student at Seam Early Childhood Center (SECC) qualifying for pre-kindergarten based on income. He lives with his Mom, Dad, and brother (8) in a three-bedroom duplex. Both Mom and Dad grew up in Seam and their families still live in the town providing Israel with a very large extended family. Dad works for a utility company and Mom is a teacher's aide at SECC. Prior to this year, Mom worked in childcare.

Israel shares a bedroom with his brother; however, Mom says he still does not sleep in his own bed all night. Their bedroom was decorated with University of Texas (UT) posters and bedding. On the dresser were several Lego models that Mom explained was their hobby. They also have a playroom that is set up specifically for them with two child-size chairs and multiple toy shelves against the wall. Another shelf held a television-DVD combination set, books and DVDs. The toys were sorted into bins by similarities. Israel pointed out his bin of "characters." He pulled them out one by one and said, "These are all my characters—Spider man, Mickey Mouse, Bumble Bee, Kung Fu Panda." He also had several open ended dramatic play materials such as a fire station, dress-up clothes, and vehicles.

Mom stated that Israel is not shy and is "real talkative." This is very reassuring for Mom because during her pregnancy with Israel, medical tests showed that it was highly probable that he would have a chromosomal disorder—probably a form of Down's Syndrome. The family decided to stop testing and wait. At birth there were no signs of

any disorder; however, she continues to worry about his development. She explained, “They did measurements, blood work, DNA tests and nothing showed up. I still think that something might be wrong because he was late to walk, but his teacher says he is at the top of his class and has no problems.” Mom added that she thinks because of this scare she is very protective of him and she believes that has lead to him being extremely attached to her. This is evident in his behavior at McDonald’s. He continuously kept looking to make sure Mom was there. When Mom did leave to go get ketchup at the counter, he ran after her. As long as he is sure of where Mom is, he plays on the playscape, eats, and visits with me. Brother also provides security for Israel, especially when he and his brother stay in the school office with their grandmother for a few minutes until his mother is free of her duties. During this time, Israel follows his brother’s requests and directions looking to him as the one in charge.

This strong tie between Israel and his brother was seen during several visits. During one visit, Israel was playing Wii and his brother asked to play too. Israel quickly included him in the game by starting over and adding a second player even though it was difficult for him to do. During the game, Israel commented, “We are allies” as they worked through defeating a pretend enemy. Mom also commented that Israel and his brother were “friends, best friends.” Although very different in their mannerisms and behaviors according to Mom, they both love school and enjoy reading and writing. Israel wants to be just like his brother especially in being able to read.

### **Israel and reading and writing**

The motivation to learn to read that Israel gets from his relationship with his brother is very apparent. For example, when he and his brother played card games and

looked at books, he would ask Brother what a word was, repeat it over several times as if putting it into memory, and the next time he would say it before his brother could. These types of environmental print opportunities were abundant in Israel's home. There were pictures on the walls, a calendar that Mom used, DVDs and games with titles, cereal and food boxes such as Hamburger Helper, and words on the Wii and DS games that he plays all providing opportunities to read. I was surprised that Israel could read the graph on the Wii at the end of his game. He looked at the graph and said, "It says I am almost a pro." Which was information gathered from interpreting the actual graph.

Israel also enjoys opportunities to be read to and to practice his reading skills as part of his home literacy practices. Mom says that he loves books and loves for you to read to him. He has many books in his room as well as access to books that he shares and books that he checks out at school. Reading is a part of the family's daily practices not just as part of a nightly routine, but also during the afternoon when he stays with his grandmother and when he "helps" his brother do homework. Israel will listen to Brother read and then try to read the same story or book. Mom enjoys reading for pleasure and models reading for her sons often. There are newspapers, adult books, and magazines around the home as well.

Writing was also visible in Israel's home. There were writing materials available to him. While I was there, he asked if he could write in my notebook. He then went and got his own markers and began to write his name and draw pictures. Mom reminded him that he had his own notebook. It was interesting to note that Israel was still changing hands when he is writing. During Mom's interview about a month later, she commented

that Israel had a hard time deciding which hand to use but now was “definitely left-handed.”

Israel uses writing as part of his literacy practices. Not only does he draw and write for fun, he and his brother keep a journal at home “just like they do at school.” Mom added that when they are upset, she will tell them to write about it. This has become a strong literacy practice for Israel and his brother. Mom has a similar practice of writing down things that are bothering her. She says that it helps to solve the problem and quit worrying. Israel also uses writing to label his property and make important statements. Mom told of a time that his brother, Dad and he went to the store. They each came home with a Gatorade. Israel went and found a marker and wrote his name on his bottle notifying everyone that “Nobody drink my Gatorade.”

Mom is a list maker and Israel loves to cross off the times that have either been accomplished or items put in the basket at the grocery store. In fact, during our visit to McDonald’s I commented that I was going to the grocery store next and Israel told me he would help me make my list. He named off items that he thought I might need and if I did, I would write them down. This was an example of how list making was a well established literacy practice for Israel. Mom also described how she would write down goals that she had whether it was to go to school, get a new job, or to save up for an item. She posts them on the mirror to see them daily. The boys see this and ask her about it often. Mom said that putting it into writing seems to make it a real possibility. Writing is a powerful tool for Israel’s mom and she is sharing that literacy practice with her sons.

Israel and his brother were intrigued by my note taking. I would jot a few words down, and they would want to see what I wrote and have me read it to them. On

occasion, I would have to put my notebook away and on other occasions they would ask once and then ignore me and the notebook. Curiosity about words and letters is a big part of Israel's home literacy practices. He satisfies this curiosity through asking questions and applying skills he has learned. He can sound out simple words and uses context and sound clues to decode many words. Mom says they can't spell around him anymore in order to keep information from him. "He is too quick to figure it out."

### **Israel and communication**

Curiosity stimulates Israel's reading and writing practices and it also fuels his oral language practices. "Israel, you ask too many questions," was Mom's statement when Israel kept asking me about what I was doing there. He continued asking me questions such as what color is my car, what my husband's name is, and what I had in my bag. He uses questions to gain information, to make conversation, and to entertain his listeners. He sometimes gets silly with his questions. He is very comfortable asking questions and will ask anyone. For example, Israel asked the school nurse questions about his homework and also asked a visitor to the office all about their student. Answering questions is also one of his home literacies. He is often asked questions about what happened, why he did something, which choice he would like to make, and simple knowledge questions such as how many or what this is. He is able to answer both the higher level and lower level questions.

Israel also uses conversation as a social activity. He likes to tell stories. For example, he told me about his family's trip to a UT basketball game. Brother, Mom, and Israel went to buy a souvenir during the game. When it was time to return to their seats, they were not sure of the way back. As Israel put it "We were lost.". Israel included

several details in his account including Mom's conversation with Dad on the cell phone. He said Dad kept saying go to the Red River side. Mom was stunned that he remembered so many details. His story telling showed that he has many thoughts focused around a central topic.

Israel also carries on a multi-thought conversation and can take turns with several people at a time. Playing games (either card or video) are opportunities for him to use language. Israel and his brother would talk what they were doing and commented about their success. Israel also gave directions to his brother and followed directions from his brother to try and earn a higher score. Using language as an integral part of other activities such as gaming is another of Israel's strong home literacy practices.

Conversation between family members is a common practice in Israel's home. There is a free flow of language between adults and children with interrupts and additions by everyone. Israel carries his relaxed conversation style from his family to others such as clerks at McDonalds and strangers in the office. He enjoys words and learning their meaning. He will ask if he does not understand a word and then turn around and use it in a sentence. An example of his usage of his expanded vocabulary was seen when he was bowling on the Wii. He would comment that the made a strike or a spare. He also knew words such as nunchuk and allies.

### **Israel interactions with technology and the media**

Not only is Israel's vocabulary influenced by technology, so are many other aspects of his life including use of his time, reading, writing, and daily routines. Mom shared an instance where time and technology came together. "He got a DS for Christmas and he likes it a lot. He is so funny. Last night when it was time to do



homework, he told me not to worry that he would just pause it.” Mom was surprised how easily he learned all the controls and things that the games can do. Mom says that he still likes to play Wii and watch television, but right now his DS is his favorite.

Israel and his brother used the DS to communicate with each other. They have learned to send written messages to each other on their DS. Mom explained, “It is really neat. Israel can type his message like ‘Hi, Zackary’ and send it straight to his brother’s DS. They really like it.” The cell phone also serves as a tool for Israel. Mom says that he can sent text messages to his “Nana” and loves to look at ones that Mom received. He also uses the cell phone to document events by taking pictures and recording messages. There is a computer in the home and Israel does use it to play games and with help, look things up. Since the DS, he has not spent as much time on the computer. Mom uses the computer for daily activities like sending emails and paying bills.

Israel’s interaction with technology manifests itself in his choices of toys and clothes. You can see his television viewing in his choices of toys such as Spiderman figures and Sponge Bob. He has several shirts with television characters. Israel seems to enjoy sports on television and in person. He is a UT supporter which is evidenced in his room décor. Although a part of his literacy practices, television and pop culture plays a small role. He gravitates to family activities and active games.

### **Israel’s routines and Mom’s parenting**

Israel’s routines appear to be well rooted in family and literacy as does Mom’s parenting style. Because Mom works were Israel goes to school and down the street from Brother, Mom has a routine worked out to trade pick up responsibilities with several other mothers employed at the school. When it is time for Israel to go to his dismissal

spot, he goes to the office and stays with his Grandmother. They have their own routine which uses many of his literacy practices. Israel puts down his back pack and takes out his folder. He shows Nana his daily chart and his homework. Although there is really no homework in prekindergarten, Israel has asked for work so he will have work to do like his brother. Since he is already a beginning reader, his teacher provides him with some simple leveled books, words cards, or letters. He shows them to Nana and she praises him. Then he asks for a snack. He continually asks questions of everyone as he eats his snack. He is always looking for something with letters or words that he knows. After the children from the other school are brought back to Seam ECC, Brother also comes into the office shares his snack and it is time to go to his Mom's classroom. It is very apparent that big brother is the boss in this situation. He directs when they should go and what they should do. Israel appears to enjoy this attention and follows his brother. However, if he cannot see his brother or Nana he becomes nervous until he is sure of what will happen next. He needs the consistency of his routines and does not like them to change. Mom's style of parenting comes through in her giving them specific tasks, but options within the tasks. They must stay in the office until a particular time next to their grandmother, but they are allowed to choose different things to do. Mom, his teacher and also understand the importance Israel is placing on reading and encourage him by providing the "homework" that he wants.

Other daily routines provide opportunities for Israel to use his literacy practices. Mom usually has several errands to run on the way home. Mom says, "I write everything down that I need to do." This is another example of knowing what will happen and using writing to visualize the steps. This is also an example of how Mom includes Israel in her

daily activities and allows him to take part in them. There is also a definite routine once the family arrives home. Mom explained that the boys have responsibilities such as feeding the dog. “We usually feed the big dog, and then the boys usually take their shoes off and go into the playroom to either wrestle or play fight or just play for a little bit. And then they want to watch TV. After about 30 minutes I start dinner while they continue to play.” Mom went on to describe that after dinner they do their homework, take baths, and get ready for bed which includes a story time and lots of conversation about going to sleep. Dad works different shifts and is sometimes on call for the utility company so their routines changes according to whether Dad is home or not. There are also nights where they visit family. These routines allow Israel to predict what will come next and to plan. They also encourage other literacy practices including conversation, reading, listening, and following patterns. Mom’s consistent and inclusive style of parenting allows for mutual interactions both physical and verbal.

### **Israel and school**

Israel brings his strong family relationships and interactions from home to school. He has developed relationships with his teacher, other staff members, and his classmates. His enthusiasm playing games at school and with his brother is evident. Israel is very excited about going to the same school his brother went to. At first, he cried because he had not been separated from Mom much before, but that lasted only a few days. When Mom worked in child care, he went with her. This was both Israel’s and Mom’s first year at Seam ECC. Their schedules rarely cross until after school because they are on opposite ends of a large building. Mom and his extended family support Israel through their participation in school activities, where Israel always has several supporters.

Israel has developed a strong relationship with his teachers and several adults at school. Mom said, “He loves Ms. M. I know he feels comfortable with her so that is good.” Mom also says that Ms. M knows and understands Israel. For example, Ms. M said that Israel is not just reading, but he really enjoys it. Mom agreed that “He really likes it and is so proud of himself.” Mom stressed the importance of a teacher knowing their students. She said, “It is very important because it would be frustrating if a child did not feel that he could tell his teacher what he really wanted or what he was feeling.” Mom feels that Ms. M got to know Israel because she really listens to him and he is not shy. This is another example of how his home literacy practices of questioning and conversation serve him at school.

Israel’s work is important to him and to his family. Mom shows pride and support for his work by looking over it daily and displaying it on the refrigerator. Mom said that when he brings home a painting or a paper that they always talk about it and she tells him that he did a good job. Mom added that he always says, “Really, I did a good job?” and I say “Yeah, you did a good job.” Mom then puts it on the refrigerator for that week. Mom said that she has a big filing cabinet and it has Israel’s side and his brother’s side. She admitted that she keeps almost everything and if she has to throw it away she always does it when he is not around. Mom is very sensitive to Israel’s feelings and wants him to be confident and proud of his work. His teacher also validates his desire to do school work by providing take home activities. Mom said that he always wants more, however. Mom feels that the work he does at school is appropriate and is very similar to the things that he does at home.

## **Appendix I: Lily's Literacy Story**

*"I have lots of books. See some are here and some are here," Lily says as she points to several places in her room. There were coloring pages, a children's Bible, and about ten story books. Lily loves her books. She loves to learn and interact with people. This is the basis of Lily's literacy practices.*

### **Lily and her family**

Lily (4) lives with her Mom (23), Mom's boyfriend, and her sister (2) in a small house in Seam. The house is an older home that Mom says her boyfriend has lived in for the past 12 years. On the large front porch there are several riding toys for the girls. Inside there is a living room, kitchen and two bedrooms. Lily and her sister met me at the door and invited me in. In the living room there was a couch, love seat and chair. On another wall was a large television. The house was very clean, although Mom commented that she and the girls were putting up their things. She said, "I know you said don't worry about the house being clean, but I can't help it." The living room was uncluttered with no pictures on the walls and no other decorations. Lily asked me to go see her and her sister's room. Each girl had their own bed which was a twin mattress on the floor with brightly colored comforters. Beside their bed, each girl had a plastic desk. Across the room was a dresser with a television/DVD combination sitting on top. There were several movies stacked next to it television.

Lily's room was filled with literacy opportunities. Books, electronic games, board games, and dolls found in Lily's room provided opportunities to connect writing and reading to real world events. Another example of practical literacy opportunities were the papers tacked to the closet door. One note described Red Ribbon Week where there was a special activity everyday such as crazy sock day. Lily told me that the paper

was there to tell her what to wear. On a later visit, Mom showed me how she had redecorated the girl's room with some great finds from a garage sale. She had worked hard on the room as she said "to make it look more like a girl's room." Both she and the girls were very proud of the room. This pride is seen in many of the home literacy practices that are part of Lily's daily routines. For example, she takes her time with her coloring and writing and wants it to be just right.

### **Family, schedules and responsibilities**

Lily's family works together, plays together, and learns together. Lily and her sister are close in age (19 months apart) and enjoy doing a lot of the same things at this point in their development. This can be seen in their toys, books, and clothes. What one sister has the other one has something that is very similar. The sisters enjoy many literacy practices together, alone and with Mom. Mom says that they all love to color together. If she had more time she would like to help Lily learn more things about the world.

Mom works hard to provide for her family. She works as a home health aide for a company in a large neighboring city. Her schedule varies and is not always consistent. Sometimes it is hard for her to juggle work, family and school because Mom has the sole responsibility for Lily and her sister. Her feelings of forgetfulness and being overwhelmed were expressed when she said "I am the oldest 23 year old I know." This is compounded by limited help from her extended family. Mom shared that she and her family don't get along because they have different ideas about things. She wants her children to grow up different that she did, "more respectful and doing what they should."

Therefore, Mom puts a lot of emphasis of Lily following her instructions and being able to do things herself.

Schedules and routines are difficult to establish when your schedule is inconsistent. However, there are several times where routines are important to Lily's family. Lily explained that after school she knows what to do. She said, "I take my folder out of my back pack and Mom checks it and signs it. Then, I hand it there" as she pointed to pegs on the wall in her room. Mom added that she goes right to her room to color and watch television. "Coloring is her thing." Bed time has a special routine that they follow which includes reading books and watching a little television. Saturdays and Sundays are for doing laundry, cleaning up, and cooking. Mom stresses the importance of being neat and clean and her home being neat and clean. Lily helps Mom keep the house neat by cleaning up her room and helping with other chores. As Mom's helper, Lily engages in literacy events that develop her independence and life skills. For example, she was playing with a toy purse in her room. She opened it up and inside was a cash register receipt. I asked her what it was and she said, "It is that paper you get when you buy something at H.E.B." She did not have the vocabulary word, receipt, but had the concept of the meaning of the writing on the paper. She was able to help her Mom with the laundry by putting the clothes in and starting the dryer. Her literacy skills enabled her to follow the directions and "read" the dial to start the dry.

During the time of my observations, Mom had to deal with several tragedies that affected her health and family. However, she still continued to make sure Lily went to school and also that she worked with me on the research. This resiliency that is seen in Mom is also seen in Lily's good attitude and eagerness to interact with others and school

activities. Mom states that no matter what, she is always ready to go to school and ready to learn.

### **Lily and communication**

By observing the communication and language in Lily's home several important literacy practices can be identified. Mom and the girls communicate in a way where Mom takes the lead in most of the conversations. She will ask Lily questions about what she was doing and what happened at school. She also has Lily communicate to her sister questions and directions, but say's that sometimes Lilly does not get them quite right. Mom is very particular about how Lily speaks to her and wants her to be respectful and obedient. Lily asks questions of Mom and also asked questions of other adults like her teacher.

Mom has an easy, comfortable manner about her conversation. She asks questions and listens. She is a good storyteller and enjoys telling about the girls or other experiences. Lily has taken on this literacy practice and enjoys talking to adults and children.

Mom's cell phone is a major communication vehicle for the family. It is the only phone they have and she uses it for business and pleasure. Lily does not show much interest in the phone, Mom is the primary user. On one visit Mom's cell phone rang and she answered the phone "Hola" and continued the conversation in Spanish. I was very surprised to learn that she was bilingual. Mom explained that she learned Spanish when she was 15. Lily's dad, who Mom says they never see, and his family spoke Spanish. She also added that several of her friends and her boyfriend's friends and family also speak Spanish. She often speaks to the children in Spanish, and worries that this



sometimes interferes with Lily's ability to express herself. Mom says that Lily understands Spanish, but does not speak it a lot.

### **Lily and her interactions with technology and the media**

Television and movies are a big part of Lily's literacy practices. The television was on during our visits usually on Nickelodeon or other cartoons. The programs sometimes caught Lily's attention and she stopped to watch for awhile, but she did not sit for very long. It appears that she caught the shows on the run. Lily includes television in her daily routines after school and before bed.

Lily and her family enjoy watching movies together. On one Saturday visit, the living room had been turned into a television theater. Mom had taken the cushions off the couch and made them into beds for the girls. Mom explained that they had stayed up late and watched movies last night. I told her that it was so smart to create such a cool place. The girls jumped and played until Mom told them to go and get dressed. They were also planning a movie day with friends, which was going to be a special treat for everyone.

Lily chooses movies and television on her own for entertainment. Mom reported that Lily can work the DVD player herself and often goes into her room and puts on a DVD to watch. Her favorite characters from the media are seen in her toys and clothes. She has a Dora toy computer and a Diego color game. She has slippers and pajamas with Dora the Explorer. Hello Kitty and all of the princess are also favorites of Lily. The media and popular culture influence can also be seen in her knowing all about McDonald's. These popular icons are part of her literacy practices that she interacts with daily.

Lily sees other technology items used, but does not have access to them herself. Mom said that they have an old Dell computer that someone had given her boyfriend. Mom explained that Lily was just too rough and banged on the computer at home, but she always talks about playing on the computers at school. Mom has a cell phone, but Lily is not allowed to use it, and Mom says that she really is not interested in it and doesn't understand about texting.

Pictures and camera are limited in Lily's home. Lily does not use the digital camera because Mom is afraid that she will mess it up. She does, however, have a toy camera that she plays with showing the concept of recording with a camera. Mom says they have scrapbooks that Lily wants to look at, but Mom tries to limit this because it seems to upset Lily. "I try not to show it to her too often because her Dad is not involved in her life anymore and he is in most of the pictures. Last time it took me forever to calm her down." Lily's Mom monitors her involvement with technology and technology products. However, technology literacies are modeled for Lily and she is developing basic understandings of their uses and abilities.

### **Lily's experience with reading, writing and singing**

Writing and drawing is a very visible literacy practice in Lily's home. As Mom said, "Coloring is her thing." Mom uses coloring to entertain Lily at home and at other places such as restaurants. "The waiters come around with paper and colored crayons that that keeps them pretty calm." Lily takes her time to color so that it is very neat. She also is learning to write letters and numbers as well as her name. When I visited her at home, she asked if she could write in my notebook. She wrote several of the letters in her name. She also wrote several numbers. On another visit she noticed the letters on my

shirt and wanted to copy them. Not only did she write the letters, she drew a picture of me and my shirt to put the letters on.

Lily is still learning about writing. She makes some of her letters backwards and has trouble with the beginning of her name because of the double L. She attempts to make many different letters during one of my visits including all the letters in Texas. She is very proud of her work and enjoys the praise that Mom gives her for her efforts. Lily also has several toys that she can draw and write on. Mom said, “She loves to write in her Diego thing.”

Letters and writing is all around Lily providing many opportunities to develop literacy skills and practices. Lily has access to environmental print in her home, which include books, cereal boxes, DVD cases, receipts, and flash cards that Mom has bought for her. Lily notices the words on her clothing such as Dora or Hello Kitty. On picnic day, she and her sister had cute shirts with appropriate sayings for the day. Lily’s said “Great Day for a Picnic.” Mom had found what she called the right shirt for the day, “I saw it and thought it would be perfect.”

Mom also models writing for Lily. She keeps a journal and even made a journal of letters for Lily. She uses the flash cards to try and teach Lily the letters. At work Mom says that she has to write up reports and keep her time and schedule. She pays bills online or goes and pays them. Literacy practices revolving around writing are used to entertain, save information, and handle daily activities.

Reading is also an important literacy practice in Lily’s home. She and Mom share a love of reading and books. Mom said, “I love to read. I read all of the time. I used to have so many books, but lost a lot of them from moving. I am starting to collect them

again.” Lily said, “I have lots of books.” Mom talked about visiting the public library, but did not check out any books. Mom reads to Lily as an important time of their bed time routine.

Books are not the only time reading takes place. Lily received several games for Christmas that offer opportunities to read. One of them is called Picnic Manners which has a CD and a book to go along with it. Lily enjoys playing the game and listening to the CD. On my first visit, Lily was very interested in the magazines and mail that were in my literacy bag. Lily asks what words say as she encounters them in her daily life. She asked about the letters on my shirt, the mail in my bag, the words on my computer, and the letters on the flash cards. Her curiosity and interest in reading is a big part of her literacy practices.

Singing is also an important part of Lily’s literacy practices. Mom said that she had made up a song to teach her brother how to spell his name and was doing the same thing for Lily. Mom said, “She asks me everyday to sing her name with her. She is getting used to it.” Mom also commented that Lily loves to sing the ABCs now. “I tried to teach her, but she didn’t learn it until she went to school. Mom also talked about teaching Lily the songs from her childhood. She has even shared a song with Lily’s teacher. She sang it for me and it was very unique and not one I was familiar with. Mom and Lily share a very important literacy practice that is a very important part of their family interaction.

### **Lily’s school experience**

Mom’s experience with pre-kindergarten has not been a smooth one. Although, she is very glad that Lily likes school and enjoys going, she has some concerns. Mom

shared an incident that happened at school. She was going to be late to pick up Lily and called the office to let the school know. The secretary told her that it was okay this time, but she could not be late again. “She was rude. I thought I did NOT put her in this school.” She went on to say that she had this same thought on several occasions. Mom added that the “ladies who open the car doors are sometimes rude and hurry you along.” Mom questions some of the rules that the school has and doesn’t understand why they are necessary.

Mom also questions some of the activities that Lily has been asked to do. For example, the students had a take home family project to make an “All About Me” poster. Mom said, “I talked to the teacher because I didn’t think that it was right to ask the children to do the project.” She explained that when she was little she was not able to participate in these types of activities because she did not have support at home and it made her feel very bad. Mom shared, “I don’t want any children to have to feel at school like I did just because their family is bad.” She went on to say that the teacher explained that they had several options for the children and they helped everyone make their poster. Mom also shared more of her own school experiences. She talked about teachers who did not seem to care about the students. She went on to say that in spite of these issues, she loved school and still wants to go back and learn more.

Mom’s concerns about school have not affected Lily’s excitement about school nor her relationship with the teacher. Mom says, “Lily loves her teachers especially Mrs. M.” She went on to say that she hates to admit it, but sometimes it makes her a little jealous. “It is Ms. M this and Ms. M that, me and Ms. M this and me and Ms. M that, it is just a constant battle between Ms. M and me,” Mom laughs. Mom added how important

it is for a teacher and student to have a good relationship. “Ms. M really understands Lily. If she did not feel comfortable with Ms. M, I don’t think that they would have that connection for her to learn. Ms. M adores Lily.” Mom feels that Ms. M has gotten to know Lily through several ways. First, Mom said that Lily is easy to get to know because she is very outgoing and loves to visit with you. “Ms. M gets to know me, too because I know Lily talks about me.” Also, Mom said that she and Ms. M have had several conversations and there have been many notes back and forth.

“I think Ms. M is doing a really good job with all her students, especially Lily.” Mom went on to share how Lily did not know that much before school started and she is really learning. She gave an example of how she had tried to teach her to sing the ABCs and Ms. M taught her. “For some reason, she just wouldn’t pick it up with me.”

Mom does have some concerns about Lily’s skills. After attending a parent conference, Mom came home and started right away to work on the skills that the teacher had shared with her. She said that her boyfriend had gone out and bought flashcards of the letters and sounds. She used these cards during a snack time that I visited. She asked each girl what letter the snack started with and showed them the picture. She then went through several other cards with them. She commented that it was hard for Lily and she would continue to work on it. Mom also is concerned that Lily sometimes does not grasp the work that she brings home such as rhymes like *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*. She said, “We go over it, but she does always get it. I am not always sure of what they were supposed to be doing. I need more explanation on some of the work.” She added that she can tell she is a little behind from the report card and progress notes that Ms. M sends home.

Mom is very proud of the work that Lily does at school. She supports her efforts by attending all of the school functions that she can. For example, she planned ahead and took the day off for to join her at the family picnic. Mom also values the work that Lily brings home by displaying it around the home. She has framed and hung Lily's Super Duckling Award in her room. She commented, "I am so proud, I hope she continues to do good and get more awards." Mom saves all of Lily's work in a case so that she can make a scrapbook of it at the end of the year.

## **Appendix J: Marcos' 'Literacy Story'**

*Marcos comes and sits next to me on the couch and looks at the palm pilot I have in my hand. He asks if he can use it and I show him how I can type on it. Without saying a word, he gets up, gets his DS and hands it to me. When I tell him he has to show me how to use it he looks at me strangely and begins to show me his skill at several different games maneuvering in and out of the games with no help. This is an example of the literacy practices and skills that Marcos has developed through his interactions with media and technology in his home.*

### **Marcos and his family**

Marcos lives with his Mom, 22, and Dad, 23, in an apartment close to the school. His family recently moved there from a different apartment about a mile away. Marcos is an only child. During our first visit, Mom asked if all the parents of the pre-kindergarteners were young. She then shared her story with me about becoming pregnant in high school with Marcos and the difficulty she had finishing school and getting her high school diploma. She works at a local detention center. Dad has some high school credits and currently is not working. Both parents are natives to the area. Mom was born in Seam and has not lived anywhere else. Dad is from a larger town nearby and moved to Seam when he was ten. Mom and Dad were married three years ago. Mom, Dad, and Grandmother share in caring for Marcus. Mom works nights so Grandmother and Dad share the night responsibilities while Mom takes care of the morning and afternoon time. Marcus is a frequent visitor at Grandmother's house.

Marcos interacts with all the members of his immediate family and large extended family. There are cousins, nieces, nephews, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends that are important people in Marcos' life and literacy development. However, Marcos and Mom appear to have a very special relationship. This relationship can be



seen in the time and activities that Mom and Marcos share together. Each time when I went to the home, Mom and Marcus engaged in an activity that included only the two of them regardless of the others present. One day they were carving a pumpkin, another time they played several board games, and another they were packing boxes together. During the activities, Mom and Marcus interacted in an easy manner with back and forth conversation. During many of the visits, Mom talked on her cell phone as she worked and talked to Marcus.

Mom let me know right away that Marcos and she were alike in many ways. She said that he is quiet and shy around “other people” just like she is. She also talked about how she did not like school. Mom said, “I hated school. I had him when I was a junior and I missed a lot of school because I wanted to stay with him.” She added that Marcos liked school now, but at first, he did not like school because he did not like getting up early and being away from her.” Mom attends all the class parties, field trips, and special activities. She also comes at least once a week to eat lunch with Marcos.

### **Marcos and routines**

Marcos’ routines revolve around Mom’s work schedule. Mom picks Marcos up from school and they either go home to eat or go to Grandmother’s for dinner. At Grandmother’s house he plays with his nieces and nephews that are around his age. Bath time is around 7:00 with bedtime is 8:00. Mom tries to get Marcos in bed before she leaves for work. After teeth brushing and saying prayers, Mom lays down with him. She pointed out that Marcos fights her about going to bed and that is why it is important for her to get him to sleep before she leaves for work and Dad takes over. Weekends are reserved for sleeping late and visiting Dad’s family for a barbeque. Mom said that the

family really does not have any other routines. These routines incorporate opportunities for Marcos to interact with extended family and show the important position Mom plays in Marcos' everyday life and practices.

### **Ways Marcos and his Mom use language**

“Quiet and shy like me” are the words that Mom used to describe Marcos and this is evident in how Mom and Marcos use language in conversations and daily life. When Mom and Marcos are having a conversation, they use a soft tone of voice and freely exchange ideas. Marcos also interjects his comments into Mom's conversations with adults, but very quietly and respectfully.

Mom had several conversations on her cell phone during the observations. When Mom talked on the cell phone, she spoke quietly and continued to do other things. For example, Mom and Marcos were carving a pumpkin and she was talking on the phone about a time when Marcos was sick. She answered a call-waiting call and clicked back to the original call all the while Marcos and she drew on the pumpkin. She also went to the DVDs, listed the ones she had to her friend on the phone, and returned to Marcos and the pumpkin. Marcos waited and did not try to get her attention when she was on the phone. As soon as Mom finished her phone conversation, she turned her attention to carving the pumpkin. She and Marcos discussed the shapes for the face and even involved me identifying the ones they were using. They argued over what the insides of the pumpkin were called, and Marcos sided with the name his teacher had used. Even though there was disagreement, there was an easy flow to the exchange, and it appeared that discussions and disagreements were an accepted part of their everyday literacy practices.

Marcos successfully participates in literacy practices using his language skills outside of the home to request items, meet his needs, and even engage in humor. During our visit to McDonald's, Marcos had to be encouraged to place his order. He successfully ordered nuggets, fries, Sprite, and a toy ball. Mom observing Marcos ordering, commented, "He is shy and quiet with everyone except me when we are alone." His ability to use language as humor was seen when Marcos called me from the Playscape saying, "You can't get me, but you can take my picture."

### **Marcos and technology**

Entering Marcos' apartment, I was immediately aware of the technology that is visible in all areas of the home. In one corner of the family living room is a large flat screen television. A Public Broadcasting System (PBS) cartoon was playing on the television. One chair held a lap top computer that Dad frequently used. On the wall perpendicular to the television was an empty aquarium that serves as a shelf for a variety of DVDs. Also on top were a CD player, speakers, and a variety of CDs. On another end table was Marcos' Nintendo DS game (DS). On the bottom shelf of the microwave cart were several board games that are electronic. Mom also reported that Marcos has a Play Station III and loves to play "Star Wars." Mom and Dad both have their own cell phones that are used frequently during my visits. Marcos knows how to use the phone. In fact, Marcos notices when a text message comes in on Mom's phone and wants to see the message.

All of these technology devices are not just visible or used only by the parents, Marcos can and does use and enjoy them. On his DS game, he showed me games where he had taken pictures of himself and parents and superimposed them on the characters in

the game. He also showed me how he had added sound effects to one game. His favorite thing to do is play “Star Wars” on his DS. When asked how he learned to play these games he credits his Dad.

Technology and the media also serve as a stimulus for family interactions and conversations. For example, Dad and Marcos discussed the cartoon on the television and planned what they would watch next. Mom and Marcos played board games that have an electronic dimension. In the penguin game, the penguins jump around and the object is to use tongs and “catch” as many as you can. Mom states emphatically, “Marcos always wins.” Sometimes Marcos changed the rules or developed them as they went along to insure a win. He has a good understanding of the literacy practices that go along with rules, taking turns, and interchanging items such as pictures and sounds.

### **Marcos’ interactions with reading and writing**

The strong video game influence provides multiple reading practices. Marcos was able to navigate through his PlayStation and DS prompts easily. He has learned to “read” the icons and prompts much like he is beginning to learn letters and high frequency words at school. He looked at the shapes, remembered the beginning sounds and letters, and used picture clues to find the meaning. He explained how to make the games work and knew what to do when the batteries ran low—“You plug it in.” There were other opportunities to engage in pre-reading occurred while he and his mother played board games. During Sponge Bob - Operation, Mom showed Marcos the card and began to say the first word and Marcos would finish it. She also pointed to the word and allowed him time to use his clues to make a guess, she would then help him. Marcos would then look at the game board, find the matching piece and try to take it out without

making a noise. Another example of Mom and Marcos' interaction with print was when Marcos wanted to write his name on my Palm Pilot. He asked Mom to help him and she called out the letters accentuating the sounds and he wrote them down. These phonemic awareness activities seemed to come naturally to Mom.

There are many examples of print in Marcos' home. As I entered the apartment, I saw a large helium balloon with "Happy Birthday" written on it. A small bulletin board was centered on one wall with several papers tacked up on it. A calendar was next to the bulletin board. There were writing tools in the room such as the marker for the pumpkin. Marcos sees Mom use a calendar and a journal. She noted that she always kept a calendar, but she had just started using the journal. She also added that she had to keep log books at her work which are similar to keeping a journal. Marcus did show interest in writing when he looked through my literacy bag. He spent the longest amount of time using the markers to draw snowmen in the small spiral notebook and to write letters from his name.

Storybook reading is not a focus of Marcos' family literacy practices. I did not see any books in the apartment; however, I did not have an opportunity to see his room or the other rooms upstairs. Mom said that they like to read books and sing songs like the ABCs. She also mentioned that they read books for his reading log at school. She commented that his teacher stressed reading and the reading log. Mom talked about Marcos' attention to reading and stories. She said that sometimes when she tries to read to him, he is "not into it." Marcos did choose a book from my literacy bag, but only looked at it for about two minutes before choosing a sticker game. Although Mom feels that he enjoys stories and reading he does not give his whole attention to the event.

While Marcos' multiple experiences with reading and writing practices vary from some of the school type events and practices, they still provide him with unique literacy practices. His use of reading are seen in his reading of cards, cues on video games, titles of CDs, and texts on the cell phones show success in interacting with print and the development of pre-reading skills.

### **Marcos and his school experience**

Mom and Dad are sharing Marcos' pre-kindergarten school experience. Mom has attended every parent involvement activity, conference, awards assembly and party that has occurred. Dad has also attended several of these functions. Mom shared that she goes to all the activities because Marcos asks her to. She said, "He tells me [about them] and asks if I am going to be there for him." Although Mom does not remember if this was a practice of her Mom, it is an important part of her parenting.

Not only are Marcos and his family connecting with school at school, they make connections at home with school events and activities. Mom gave several examples of these home-school connections. She told about when Marcos argued about what the pumpkin insides were called, professing that his teacher was right. She also talked about several projects they had done as a family, including completing a weekly reading log.

Marcos shares his day with Mom when he gets home. He talks about his friends and says that his favorite thing to do at school is eat. Mom expressed that she felt that the work that he brings home from school is appropriate and that he does a good job. She goes on to say that she thinks that he does better work at school than at home. "He listens and he is more respectful at school. He is different with me. When I read to him he doesn't get it. He is totally different at school."

## **Appendix K: Robin's 'Literacy Story'**

*Entering Robin's home for the first time I see the Candy Land game in the middle of the floor where the girls had left it to come and answer the door. Brother is working on his blog on the computer, Dad is sitting on the couch reading the paper, and little sister is following after Robin enjoying a pixie stick. As I set my bag of literacy paraphernalia down on the floor, Robin grabs a book and asks "Can you read? I can't. What does this say? Can you read this to me?" This eagerness and excitement is typical of Robin's involvement in the literacy practices at home and at church.*

### **Robin and her family**

Robin lives in a two-story house in a new subdivision in Seam with Mom (31), Dad (33), brother, Chris (9) and two sisters—Cassie(2), and Tara (8). She is the third child in the family. The family has just recently moved from another state. Dad is a teacher in a neighboring district and Mom has a home photography business. She is also participating in an alternative education program to become a teacher. Mom has a bachelor's degree from a large university and Dad has Bachelor and Masters degrees from the same university. The children attend public school at the present time, but Mom commented that she was considering home schooling. She said that it was a big decision to allow Robin to attend prekindergarten. Robin was eligible for prekindergarten under the qualifier of economically disadvantaged.

Family and church are the overarching themes in Robin's literacy practices. As members of their church, many of their practices involve family time together at home and at church. Every Saturday the children have a church activity. The older children and adults work with the younger children to learn various prayers and proclamations. Memorizing and reciting are done in the Saturday group activity and then performed for the whole church. Mom commented later about the program that Robin participated in.

She said, “It was so cute. Robin stood up at the microphone and said that she had responsibilities at home.” Memorizing scripts is one of the many literacy events and practices embedded in the children’s participation in the worship services. For example, during my visit one boy about eight years old led a prayer and another older girl read from the scriptures. Bulletin boards, newsletters, song books, and Bible story activities are visible in each room of the church building. The activities that I observed were similar to those done in pre-kindergarten, even to using the same techniques to get the children’s attention such as “If you can hear me touch your nose.” Robin’s church activities provide many opportunities to practice routines and literacy practices which are very similar to school routines.

### **Routines and schedules**

Robin’s family has several routines developed from their church life and Mom’s desire to keep the family organized and productive. According to Mom, these routines are more like schedules which Mom helps the family follow. Mom went on to explain that when the children get home from school they eat a snack and play from about 3:30 to 5:00. At 5:00 the children begin working on their homework. Robin usually colors or practices writing her name. Dinner is at 6:00 followed by bath time and a 7:30 story time. The family reads together for half an hour and then the children can read in their bed for another fifteen minutes making bedtime 8:15.

Other routines are found at meal time, during cleaning up, and Sunday activities. The children help set the table and clear the table after dinner. Cooking is usually done by Mom while the children are playing. Mom said, “Occasionally they help me cook. Robin loves to make cookies.” Each child helps clean up their own room. In fact, Robin



was very proud that she had cleaned her room for me to see on our first home visit. According to Mom, Robin doesn't have any other chores. "The older two children have chores. We just have not given any to Robin yet."

Sundays are days that revolve around church, home, and family. Mom explained what Sunday's are all about. "We don't play with friends. We spend it as a family. That is when we do our family scrapbooks or blog updates." Scrapbooking is one of Robin's favorite things to do on Sundays. Mom explained that when working on a page, Robin tells her about it and she writes it down. Mom has Robin tell her what she did, what she remembered about it, and how she felt about it. This literacy practice provides a strong foundation for writing and comprehension. Mom concluded her description of Sunday routines by saying that it is all about family. She said, "Sunday is our day. We don't do anything else. We don't shop, play with friends, or go out and eat. It is my favorite day of the week."

### **Ways Robin and her family use language**

Problem solving, sharing, teaching, supervising, and interaction are all functions of language in Robin's home. These multiple uses of language provide Robin with many different literacy practices to rely on as she interacts at home and school. Both Mom and Robin use their language to solve problems. Robin asked questions of me to figure out what I was doing and what was going to happen next when I visited her at church. She wanted to know how long I was staying, if I was "babysitting her," and if I could stay until the end. When she had the answers she needed, she went on to join the other children. Similarly, Mom said that if she had a problem with school, she would call the teacher and ask questions.

Conversation at the dinner table is used to share the family's daily activities and also for the parents to keep abreast of what is going on with their children. Mom said, "We try to find out what they talked about on the playground especially with the older two. We want to know what they talked about with their friends on the playground and what they did." Mom says these conversations help fill them in on what their children are doing.

Robin's parents also use their nightly conversations to teach different values and ideas to their children. Mom shared that they had been doing something new for the past few weeks to help the children learn "to focus on other people." They had set a family goal of doing one nice thing for another person without being asked. Mom stressed how important it was for the children to share their "something nice" with each other.

Mom also shared how important communication is within the family and between the school and the family. This was evidenced in her comment that for a student to be successful in school there must be communication between parent and children and parents and teachers. Specifically, she said, "It takes both of us for a child to be successful in school." This is evidenced in the number of times that Mom talks to Robin's teacher, visits the classrooms, and networks with neighbors who attend Robin's school. Similarly, Robin has good communication with her teacher. When asked how Robin's teacher got to know Robin and the family, Mom responded that she probably learned it from Robin herself. "She is not shy; she will tell you how she feels and what she thinks should be happening." This easy communication between Robin and adults was seen many times in the way in which she interjected her comments into conversations between other adults. She knew when to do so without being rude. It was

apparent that her participation in conversations was welcomed. Strong communication and language skills are part of Robin's home literacies.

### **Robin and music**

Robin engaged in singing at church and at home. She sang along with the tunes that played on her toys. She also sang the ABCs as she looked at books. At church, Robin participated in the songs including the hand motions. Mom noted that Robin sings the songs she has learned at school during dinner. Although Robin appears to enjoy singing, her family sees her songs as a way of learning concepts and skills. Mom emphasized how literacy is connected to music and talked about how she listened to music and read to Robin in utero because it would help with literacy.

### **Robin's interactions in writing and reading**

Robin has many different examples of writing in her daily life at school, at church, and at home. Observing Robin at her Saturday church practice, there were multiple writing examples. Song books, the scripts the children were reading from, the menu on the board requesting donations, bulletin boards, the sign for community projects, song numbers posted in the front of the church, banners, and environmental signs all provided opportunities for Robin to interact with the printed word. She was able to maneuver through this print-rich environment easily. She did need the adults at the church to read her lines in the script. This was done by the teacher in charge and older children. The teacher told the older students, "You stand here and help some of the children if they have trouble reading." At the church, Robin was also given opportunities to write. The first activity that they did was to draw a picture and write their name.

Using her left hand, she wrote her name and showed it to the adult leader who praised her for her work.

Home is also a print-rich environment for Robin. There are lots of books, a computer, and labels on toy containers, games, and writing materials. Although Robin does write and draw pictures, she really likes to color in coloring books. Mom reported that she has had to buy so many coloring books because Robin can color for hours. The writing that is used at home is supported not only by her parents, but by her older brother and sister. When it is homework time, Robin writes and draws beside her siblings as they complete their assignments.

Robin also likes to write letters to Grandma. Mom said that Robin writes letters all jumbled up like “edwgm cdg” and brings the paper to her and says, “I wrote ‘Dear Grandma.’” She is also showing a desire to write by signing her coloring pictures and mailing them to her family. She also helps Mom write thank you notes, cards, and letters to be mailed back to Utah.

Along with writing, reading is a very visible element of Robin’s environment and daily living. At the entrance of the playroom there is a ceiling to floor built-in book shelf. It is full of all kinds of books from picture books to adult classics. The books are very neatly placed but are in various conditions from gently worn to brand new. In the playroom there is another shelf with books that the children read and use in their play. Also, there are books in each of their bedrooms. The books are not separate from their play-- they are integrated into it. Robin uses the books to provide ideas for her dramatic play and reads in her bed before final bed time. Brother’s bedroom has many different posters on his wall including many University of Texas posters. He also has a sign

reminding the girls to “Keep Out.” The girls’ room had their names creatively placed on their own beds.

Reading is a topic of conversation. Robin asked me the first day I went to her home if I could read. When I told her that I could, she said that she could not read. I told her that I guess I had just better help her learn. She was excited and eager to look at all of my books and materials asking me continually if I could read this word or that sentence. Robin’s older sister, Tara, wanted to read the books in my bag and continued to help Robin decode some of the words. Mom said that she and Robin’s favorite activity was to read together. Dad was involved in reading that day by looking at the cards and reading them to Robin. On another visit, Dad read the paper while Robin played.

Reading as a family literacy practice was also seen in the family bedtime routine. Every night the whole family read together for 30 minutes. The children each got to choose a book to read. Often, the older children read their own books while Mom and Dad read to the two youngest. After this family reading time the children were allowed to read in their beds for another 15 minutes. Reading is also an important part of their religious practices. The family has a daily Bible reading every morning from 6:30 to 7:00. Mother and Dad both are readers. Mom loves to read all kinds of books. Dad commented that when Mom is into a book, “we have lost her for a few days.” Mom clarified that it really is only during the last 100 pages. Reading is an important literacy practice for the B family. Mom summed this up when she said, “It is important for the kids to see us reading. We have a lot of words around the house and we focus on reading with her and make sure that she sees us reading.”

### **Robin and media**

Television is not a prevailing theme in Robin's home. "I don't like movies" was her comment. However, there are elements of characters from television and movies in her room. Robin shares a room with her two sisters. There is a set of bunk beds and a single twin bed. Robin proudly showed me her bed with her name decorating the side. On the walls there are Tinkerbelle and Hannah Montana posters. On one visit we talked about her sister having a Tinkerbelle shirt like the one I have. Media motifs are also visible in the family playroom. Along one wall are carefully labeled bins for many different toys. These include a Barbie doll house, lots of Barbies and her accessories, Barbie car, My Little Ponies, and Polly Pockets. According to Mom, Barbies are Robin's second most favorite toy after crayons. Across the room are a couch and a chair. A table and chairs are in one corner. This made a perfect place for our "tea party." Robin engaged in dramatic play with her Barbie dolls, her dishes, and even her books. She loved to look at books and act them out and sing along with the stories including some Disney books. Even though Robin's television viewing is limited to PBS and a few Disney shows, popular icons are a part of her daily interaction with literacy practices.

### **Robin and technology**

In addition to television and movies, Robin's home literacy practices include using computers, digital games, and computerized toys. There are several computers in the home. There is a desk top computer visible as you enter the house, which Brother uses to update his blog, e-mail, do homework, and play games. Robin wants her own e-mail, but Mom told her that she had to be seven before she could get her own. She does use Mom's and communicates with grandmothers and other out-of-town relatives with her family's help. The B family has their own blog that they update at least once a week.

Robin can also use the computer alone. Mom says that she can navigate the family blog and look at the posted pictures all by herself. In fact, Mom reported that she had to listen carefully for the music from the computer to make sure that Robin stays on allowed websites. Mom stressed that they don't allow their children to play anything unless it is educational. She added, "We don't like the violent games."

Robin can also use the DVD player by herself to watch movies. She also plays with some V-Tech computer games and enjoys the Wii. She enjoys bowling and playing a music game. Although closely supervised, Robin is allowed use of all the technology equipment in the house. These media tools are a part of her home literacies.

### **Robin and her school experience**

"I think literacy is the foundation of all education." This was Mom's first statement about literacy and school. This is evident in the way in which the B family interacts with school. Not only do they support Robin at school by attending functions such as parties and field trips, they reinforce school activities at home. Mom feels that the work Robin is doing in pre-k is very appropriate. Mom expressed that the literacy work done at school is very similar to the literacy activities the family does at home with one exception—"I don't put as much time into it as Ms. M does." Mom pointed out that their activities are not structured, but are more naturally happening events. Mom shared that Ms. M is working extra with Robin on her reading. "She is fabulous and she was actually sending home letters and sounds that she needed to work on. She is optimistic that we will have her reading before the end of the year." Mom's reference to "we" shows the strong partnership between Robin, her family, and her teacher.

## **Appendix L: Sonia's Literacy Story**

*Little snips of paper surround Sonia as she hands her sister a cut-out rectangle and tells her, "Here's your iPhone." Sister takes the "phone" and then fusses at Sonia for touching her paper. Dad responds by telling Sister not to fuss and telling Sonia to listen to her sister. This is a typical event in Sonia's home, a home where there are lots of verbal interactions among all family members and multiple and varied literacy events and practices.*

### **Sonia and her family**

Sonia, age four, is the youngest child in her family. She has an older brother, 16, and an older sister, 7. Mom, 37, and Dad, 43, are both second language learners. Mom grew up in the Philippines and spoke Tagalog but learned English in school. Dad also lived in the Philippines until he was about six when he moved to California with his Filipino Mom and his American soldier Dad. Interestingly, Mom and Dad met in London where they were both working, not in the Philippines. When asked about his experience as a second language learner, Dad said that until he was about six his father was in Vietnam so all he spoke and heard was Tagalog. The move to California forced him to change to English. He no longer speaks Tagalog; in fact, he said, "My wife and my mother use Tagalog when they want to talk about me."

The family moved to Seam in 2006 when Dad retired from the Navy. He said, "I came to Texas because of the Dallas Cowboys." Mom is a "stay-at-home Mom" and Dad has recently returned to school to become a teacher. Previously, he had worked at the Middle School as an instructional assistant. He said that the principal "saw his military background and hired him for ISS."



The M family members are very dependent upon each other. When one family member such as older brother has an activity, it impacts the whole family. The entire family will adjust their schedule so they can all attend the event and support the brother. In fact, when Dad was asked about attending sporting events, he said, “Yes, we do all that as a family.” When asked if the children attended any groups like church, or Mothers’ day out, or clubs, Dad acted surprised by the question. He said, “For the children? No, not at their age.” Their practice of experiencing most activities as a family unit is also evidenced when Mom talks about “the girls.” For instance, when asked a question about Sonia, Mom always added something about Sonia’s sister.

### **Sonia’s routines at home**

Dad’s military background seems to have influenced the routines of the family and the order one sees when visiting their home. The home is very neat and organized. When asked about what routines Sonia had after school, Dad commented, “it starts right there,” as he pointed to hooks placed on the wall by the front door. The hooks are at Sonia’s level so that she can hang up her things without help. Mom continued to add that after the two girls hang up their backpacks, they take out their folders and give them to her. They then discuss their school work and behavior chart from the folder. Dinner time routines include all members of the family eating together. Mom and the two girls have a different bedtime routine than Dad and the brother. Mom takes the girls upstairs and gets them to bed while Dad and brother stay downstairs and watch TV.

Another way that Dad’s background influences the family is in how expectations and rules are set and followed. For example, I visited McDonald’s with Sonia’s family. Dad coached Sonia on what to say and the manners to use as she ordered her dinner and,

without being told, the girls both placed their shoes where they are supposed to go as they went out to the playground area. Both Sonia's Dad and Mom encourage the girls to use greetings and say "good bye" and "thank you" regularly. Several times Dad referred to the fact that he "learned it in the military." His military training transfers to his home life and the way in which he parents his children.

### **Some ways Sonia's family communicates**

The M family does not have any extended family near them. They keep connected with their family members on a daily basis through email, letters, phone calls, and by exchanging pictures. When discussing their holiday plans, Mom said that after they eat they will start making their phone calls. Dad talked about how all of his family lives on the East Coast and it was too far to travel for the holidays so they call each other. The children get to talk to their grandparents and aunts and uncles. Mom's family is in the Philippines. They also get phone calls from the whole family on holidays.

Conversation is a major component of the literacy practices visible in the M home. The sisters talk to each other and to their parents continuously as they participate in other activities. Talking and listening are done simultaneously with other activities. This was apparent during one of my visits. Sonia was cutting and making objects from paper, talking to her sister, listening to Dad giving directions, and then quickly moving to a game on the computer. During our interviews, both Mom and Dad talked at the same time, one trying to help the other make their point. The topics of discussion changed quickly and were not always related. For example, Mom talked about Sonia and her interest in High School Musical and the next sentence was about what she had for lunch. The sisters also change topics rapidly. They were talking about Halloween and then

began singing Itsy Bitsy Spider. Periodically, they would ask if they could watch a movie.

Conversations between adults are held in front of the children. They are expected to listen and then are allowed to ask questions and participate in the conversation. Mom said that Sonia always likes to know what the adults are saying. During the interview, Dad and Mom both referred to Sonia's curiosity about conversations between others, especially adults.

Participating in conversation is expected and encouraged. At McDonald's, Mom and Dad planned the day with Sonia offering suggestions and comments. The children were included when they discussed what they were planning to do for Halloween and Christmas. This openness between parents and children was also evidenced when Dad talked about a time when Sonia got in trouble at school and she told them about it right away. Conversation is used as a literacy practice to entertain, plan, and share information.

### **Music and rhymes**

Songs, rhymes and singing are important in the home. Sonia and her sister like to sing and dance and watch DVDs such as High School Musical. During the interview, Mom and Dad both said that Sonia and her sister sing and dance to entertain themselves.

Sonia also played with rhyme and alliteration as she worked on other activities. During a visit, she and her sister were playing in the family room. Sonia's sister started singing, "Hey, diddle the cat and the fiddle" and Sonia joined in saying, "drum, rum, sum." She continued to sing made-up word rhymes quietly as she worked with her paper.

Songs learned at school are brought home to become part of the home repertoire. Dad told about Sonia coming home with lots of new songs such as the Ocean Song, Christmas Songs and ABC songs. Sonia has learned these songs through repetition at school and shares them with her family verbally. Dad expressed that these songs are important because they are things from school that they can do at home.

### **Sonia and television, movies, and pop culture**

Television and movies have a strong presence in Sonia's life. Not only is there evidence of the actual television and movies, there is evidence of characters and icons from television shows and movies in each of the rooms of the house. A large, flat screen television is placed so that you can see it from the kitchen and family room. Under the television are approximately 40 DVDs. In the girls' room they have their own TV/DVD combination set and their own collection of movies to watch. Hannah Montana, High School Musical and Princess posters are used to decorate their room, their clothing, their Halloween costumes, their books, and their songs. Mom told a story about a time when she used 'Hannah Montana' as a way of labeling. Mom asked Sonia to go and get her pajamas. She called up the stairs to Sonia, "Get your pajamas." Sonia replied, "Which one, Mom?" Mom replied, "The Hannah Montana." Dad agreed that they used characters, colors, pictures, and some words to help Sonia identify items instead of real words.

Play items also reflect pop culture themes. For example, the girls showed me their princess costumes for Halloween. They had dresses, crowns, shoes, and wands. Other pop culture items which were plentiful in their family room were Barbie dolls, Dora the Explorer, and High School Musical items. High School Musical provided many

of the songs that Sonia and her family like to sing. Movies and DVD collections of Dora the Explorer, the Princess Series, and High School Musical are available for the girls to watch when they wish. According to Mom, Sonia is very adept at working the television and DVD players. Several Barbie dolls are in a basket by the door. Mom talked about neighbor children coming over to play Barbies.

Along with TV providing entertainment and literacy events, it is also used as a component to the family routines. Mom described the morning routines that include watching television, “I put on Sesame Street in the morning and that tends to wake them up.” Movies or television is used in the bedtime routines as well. Dad and brother watch television shows downstairs while Mom and the girls often watch a movie upstairs until they fall asleep.

There are other electronic and media devices in the home including two computers. One is a laptop which both parents and girls use and the other is a desktop that is primarily used by the brother. On each visit, Dad and sister were observed using the laptop, but not Sonia. Dad said that she knows how and does use it often. He went on to tell about the new Nintendo DS player that he had bought for the girls. He said, “We just recently got that for them because on the laptop they have been playing a lot of these—I call them girly games—dress up and things like that.” Dad added, “Now, the girls can play these on the DS.”

The digital camera and cell phone are also used by Sonia and her sister. When the girls were dressed in their Halloween costumes, Sister told Sonia to get the camera and take a picture. Sonia ran and got the camera and took several pictures. When asked if Sonia liked pictures she said that she loved to take them and look at them. She said that

they had several photo albums that they look at and talk about. Mom added that she tries to hide them so Sonia won't look at them so much and "mess them up." Sonia also knows how to take pictures with Mom's cell phone. Mom said that Sonia likes to talk on the phone, but does not know how to text yet.

### **Reading and writing at home**

"They like to draw—her and her sister—they draw a lot." This was evidenced in the amount of time that Sonia and her sister worked with paper, crayons, pens, pencils, markers, and chalk during the research visits. An easel was in one corner of the room. Under the easel was a basket that had scraps of paper, chalk, markers, scissors, and a glue stick. These were available for the girls to use whenever they wanted to. There was also a drawer in the buffet in the dining room where Mom kept her papers and pencils. Sonia and her sister would go to the drawer when they were not satisfied with the choices in the basket. In fact, Mom said that she was always going to Wal-Mart to buy notebooks and paper so they would "leave her stuff alone." She also was hoping that it would keep the writing off the walls. Mom shared a time that Sonia wrote on her wall. She was laughing, but made sure to add that they now had a chalkboard for them to write on.

Writing or drawing is an activity that both Sonia selects and Mom selects for her. Sonia likes to come in from school and write. I observed this one visit when she drew pictures and taped them all around the room. Sonia also engaged me in a writing activity. She asked me if I could draw an elephant. I tried and she then asked me if I could spell elephant. I wrote elephant in the spiral next to my picture. She continued to ask me to draw and spell other words. Drawing and writing are also instigated by Mom. She said

that when they are out, she usually gives Sonia paper and pencil or colors to keep her busy. She also gets Sonia to help in writing the grocery list.

Writing is part of the whole family's daily activity. Dad said that writing is how they communicate with their family since they live so far away. He added, "E-mails, that is how we communicate with our friends in Washington and California. We send family pictures and things like cards—Christmas cards." He also added that they use regular mail. "She writes letters to our families. My Mom and Dad aren't in the computer age." When asked about other incidents where writing is important, Dad talked about making lists, keeping records, and paying bills.

Books and reading are a part of Sonia's routines and her free time activities. Sonia's bedtime routine includes reading books with her sister and her mother. The morning routine includes television shows that emphasize letters and reading. Dad also mentioned that they do homework with the older sister that includes reading.

When asked, Mom talked about how she and Sonia like to read books together. She said, "(We read) lots of books, yes." The girls have a few books upstairs in their room. The books were well used. Mom commented that they had their favorite books that they liked read over and over again. There were no books visible in the family room. When asked if they ever went to the library, Dad reported that they did go in the summer and once every other month during the school year. Sonia chose several books from my bag during my first visit. However, the books did not hold her attention. She returned the book and chose other items including a children's magazine, markers, spiral notebook, and cards.

Everyone in the family engages in reading in different ways. Dad reports that his reading is not for pleasure. He said, “I will be honest. Reading is not my forte... Most of my reading has always been work related – professional.” Other evidence of Dad’s reading were his reading the newspaper, opening the mail and discussing it with Mom, and reading texts and emails.

Mom talked about her love of reading, but lamented that she no longer had time to enjoy it. She said, “I have time to read with my kids, but not for myself. After I had two kids—no time. When I had only one son, everywhere I go, I have a book in my hand. Now, just for Sonia. She always asks me to read books. She likes to read the books.” Mom reported that she does other reading during the day such as reading recipes, directions, bills, and the girls’ folders and assignments.

### **School/Home relationships**

The relationship between the M family and Sonia’s teacher and school was apparent during my visits. As part of their daily routine, Mom and Dad asked Sonia what she did at school that day. When asked about the type and amount of work that Sonia does Dad commented that they were amazed at the amount of work that they accomplish. He said, “You did all this today?” When asked how this work from school matched up with the activities that they do with Sonia at home, Dad responded by talking about all of the skills that Mom and Sonia work on. He said, “My wife works with them on numbers and letters.”

Mom and Dad appear to be very proud of Sonia’s accomplishments and her work at school. Not only do they take the time to look at the work daily, they also save her work. Work is posted on the refrigerator. Mom also said, “I have a container and I put



all the school stuff in it and after a month I sit down and check it out and then I keep most of the work.”

There also is evidence of a positive relationship between the teacher and Sonia. Sonia referred to her teacher, Mrs. C, several times during our visits. For example, when looking at a book, Sonia said, “That’s an owl, but sometimes I call it nocturnal. Mrs. C. told me that.” When Sonia plays school, she is Mrs. C and says, “Today’s lesson is.” Sonia’s parents show their support for the school by volunteering in the classroom at parties, field trips, and class activities. When asked why they had requested Mrs. C to be Sonia’s teacher, Dad said, “We kinda like the feedback from her and then she is very approachable—somebody we can talk to.” When asked if they felt that Mrs. C knew and understood Sonia, they both agreed. They felt that it was very important for the teacher to know their child. “When the teacher knows the child it makes it easier for them,” according to Dad. He continued to say that “When you have the support of the family it makes it that much easier for that child in school.” Mom said that she thought Mrs. C knew Sonia very well. “I would say 100% especially Sonia from her sister being in Mrs. C’s class last year. Yes, she knows my two girls very well.”

The family’s attitudes towards going to school are now different from when they were in school themselves. Mom reported that she did not like to go to school. She wanted to stay at home with her mother. She credits her older brother with making her go to school and finally being successful in school. Mom was sure to say that Sonia liked school. She said, “There are some days they wake up in a bad mood, but they both like school.” She went on to say that Sister spoke up and told Sonia that she had to go to school so when she grew up she could go to work and make money.

## **Appendix M: Jeffrey's 'Literacy Story'**

*Jeffrey stands at his easel, marker in hand, and begins writing down letters as Mom calls them out. Then on his own, he writes all the color words, everyone's name, and several random numbers. He looks around, finds Mom and calls to her to come and look at what he had done. Mom is very proud and rewards Jeffrey with a "High Five." This scenario encompasses Jeffrey's favorite literacy practices and shows the relationship that he and Mom have in learning literacy.*

### **Jeffrey and his family**

Jeffrey lives with his blended family in a new sub-division in Seam. Jeffrey says he has five people in his family which includes Mom, Dad (step-dad), brother (step-brother, 17), sister (3), and himself (4). Jeffrey's step-dad, whom he calls Dad, has been in the family since Jeffrey was about a year old. His step-brother came to live with him about three months later. Jeffrey sees his biological father regularly as well as his paternal extended family. Mom explained, "Three weekends a month he visits his dad, so he has a dad and his dad's girlfriend. I think she has a child that is married and possibly an adopted child from a previous marriage. I am not real sure." Dad and his girlfriend live in a near by town. Currently, Mom is a real estate agent and has just sold her first house. Previously, she was a firefighter. Step-Dad is a Police officer in a neighboring town.

On my first visit, Step-dad and Jeffrey answered the door. The home was very neat and tidy. One side of the large open room had a couch and coffee table with books and toy cars on it. Straight across the room was a large television set with DVD player. There were two chairs on the perpendicular wall. On the wall was a large wooden "H." Mom commented that they do not have many pictures in the house. Beside the television was a trunk which held pictures and mementos. The dining area extended from the living

area and contained a large dining table and six chairs. In the corner was a white board easel with several markers. The kitchen was left of the dining room with a small counter dividing the two rooms. The telephone, emergency numbers, and newspapers were on the counter.

Jeffrey was very excited to show me his room which he shares with his sister. Like the rest of the house, it was very organized and uncluttered. Each child had their own twin bed, his covered with a red comforter and Sister's with a Dora the Explorer comforter. On the wall was a poster with Jeffrey's name on it that he had made at church. An example of the room's organization was found in the small Hot Wheel cars that were hung in shoe pockets inside the door of his closet. A television DVD combination was on the dresser with several movies and a remote control.

Jeffrey attended Preschool Program for Children with Disability (PPCD) class last year at Seam ECC. Mom explained, "Up until last year Jeffrey did not have a lot of speech. He had a lot of frustration. He only had about 20 words." Mom shared that after a couple of months in the PPCD class he was speaking in sentences and now he does great. The Annual, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee placed him in pre-kindergarten this school year so he could continue to receive speech therapy services at school; otherwise he would not have been eligible for pre-kindergarten, Mom continued saying, "He is so smart. He repeats and remembers everything that you show him, so we fill him with as much as we can." She added that it is very important to keep his routines very consistent.

### **Jeffrey's routines**

Mom's efforts to "fill him with as much as we can" and to keep "his routines consistent" were seen in the daily activities at their home. Many literacy events and practices are involved in the experiences that Jeffrey and his family share. Mom uses structure and multi-tasking to make the most of these experiences.

Jeffrey's day is very structured. He gets on the bus around 6:30 a.m., goes to school, and returns around 3:30 in the afternoon. Jeffrey's afterschool routine begins when he gets off the bus. The first thing that Mom does is to check his folder and reward him if he has gotten a star. The rewards are sometimes stamps, extra snacks or extra play time. Then, Mom gives him a snack and a drink. She then bathes him and his sister and helps them put on their pajamas. They continue to play in the house while she fixes dinner. Sometimes, Jeffrey helps with dinner, and both children pass out the forks and napkins. Dinner is enjoyed as a family where Mom and Dad usually ask Jeffrey about his day and what he learned. After dinner, they watch the news, which Mom says is Jeffrey's favorite television show. They play for a little longer after dinner before they share a Bible story. Jeffrey then goes to his room to bed. Mom usually reads two or three books to the children in their room. She said that she often stood at the end of the bed to read, but they preferred her to sit with them on the bed. Bedtime is between 7:30 and 8:00. Sometimes during the play part of the afternoon Mom has special projects for them to do. One day that I visited, they were painting and decorating Christmas presents for Jeffrey's teachers. Other times, they may watch a movie or read more stories. Mom commented that they really don't like "kiddie games." She said that Jeffrey loves to write on his board and play with cars.

Routines have been established for most recurring activities in Jeffrey's family. For example, on our trip to Wal-Mart, the children chose whose grocery cart they wanted to ride in. Then they were given a choice of the back or the front seat. Jeffrey chose his Dad's cart and the back section. The procedure took only a few seconds and appeared to be part of their regular routine. As we went up and down the aisles, Mom asked questions and gave choices to the children.

Another example of routines was evident in the discussion that Mom and Jeffrey had about his snack and his lunch. Mom has Jeffrey on a strict diet that includes more natural ingredients, limited processed foods, and high fiber, low fat products. During one visit, Mom packed Jeffrey's lunch as she made dinner. He was given a main dish choice first, "Do you want a sandwich or yogurt?" next a choice for a snack or additional item was given, "Do you want Nutella or rice cakes, and lastly a drink was discussed. This day Mom did not give Jeffrey a choice on his drink, just explained that it was special for him and he would like it. I witnessed similar discussions about food and packing lunches on other visits. Mom is introducing a varied vocabulary as well as providing a variety of different food choices. Jeffrey uses this vocabulary correctly and often. For example, on one occasion he asked me if I wanted to stay for dinner and if I like tofu burritos.

### **Jeffrey and his parents' discipline strategies**

Another example of consistency and patterns in Jeffrey's life can be seen in the parenting styles of his mother and step-dad. Both parents appear to use an authoritative style of parenting. They are both very strict and seem to adhere to the same expectations and rules; however, they approach issues differently.

Mom's discipline strategies include many literacy and language practices including following directions, answering questions, and producing literacy products such as letters, words, or numbers. Mom also depends on rewards to help her reinforce Jeffrey's compliance with her requests. For example, Mom said that if Jeffrey has a star on his behavior chart in his folder from school, she will reward him with an extra snack, allowing him to choose his snack, a special book to read, or a prize. Also, she used a stamp of *Car's Mater* on his hand when he completed writing his name after he had refused several times. Mom uses time-out if the promise of a reward is not successful. During one visit, Jeffrey balked at writing a lower case "e" in his name. He continued to refuse even though Mom continued to provide him with several prompts, and even offered him a prize if he finished his name. Mom tried to help Jeffrey, but he did not cooperate and Mom finally said, "You are about to go to your room." After several other attempts by Mom, she sent Jeffrey to his room and told him that he could try again when he was not so frustrated. Jeffrey returned to the living room crying and Dad suggested that Mom show him one more time. Jeffrey allowed her to and then he easily wrote an "e" and finished his name. Mom rewarded him with a stamp on his hand. He then went on to write other family member's names and Mom gave him a stamp after each one. She also used rhymes and hand games such as "High Five" as shaping rewards to keep him working. Mom also used direct commands to get Jeffrey and his sister to comply. For instance, Mom told Sister to leave her painting on the table while she got a paper towel. She said, "Don't move. I forbid it." At times, she gave reasons for her requests and others she said, "Because I said so." These examples of Mom's parenting show many of the ways that she incorporates language and literacy practices into her parenting.

An example of Dad's style of parenting was seen during our visit to Wal-Mart. Dad is more direct and used action instead of words to solve the situation. Dad told Jeffrey, "If you don't start acting right I am going to put you up in that seat. Do you understand?" Dad also took away the lemon that Jeffrey was licking on and pushed away the cans that Jeffrey was using to build a tower. Dad's actions were cause and effect situations that Jeffrey had learned to participate in. With Mom, Jeffrey appears to have learned to game play and engage Mom in back and forth bantering to achieve what he wants.

### **Jeffrey and ways he and his family communicate**

Using language skills and practices in behavior situations is not the only use of these practices in Jeffrey's home. Jeffrey and his family use language to interact with each other, ask questions, make requests, and teach. Conversation or talking appears to go on most of the time. Mom says that she is always multitasking. She describes this by saying, "We do a lot of multitasking. I don't guess that I really sit down too often with him." She continues to say that the work she does with Jeffrey is "mainly verbal." For instance, during one of my visits, Mom was talking on the phone on a business call using her ear piece while she let the dog in, put it in the kennel and cooked dinner. As soon as she finished her phone call, she asked the children what they wanted to be at the church festival and continued describing the festival. There was no indication that she was no longer on the phone and no time lapse between that conversation and the one she started with Jeffrey.

Mom and Dad held many conversations during my visits. Usually the conversations between them did not involve Jeffrey. They would lower their voices and

talk between themselves. Jeffrey did interrupt his parents but not to engage with them in the conversation, it was strictly for attention. Conversations between Mom and Jeffrey were usually questions or comments by Mom and a response by Jeffrey much like you see in some classrooms. Most of the questions were knowledge type questions where there was a correct answer which Mom usually already knew. For example, she asked, “What does W-H-I-T-E spell?” or “Where did you get that fire hat?” Sister is still at the repeating stage in her language. She often said exactly what Jeffrey said.

Jeffrey used his language to ask questions and to engage socially with me. He asked me if I would eat with them and he also asked me if I liked things such as tofu or cars, or certain books. Among Jeffrey’s home literacy practices are some of the typical literacy practices found in classrooms such as the ask and answer routine, the multitasking that is necessary to keep up with all the children in the classroom, and also the practice of asking questions himself. These coupled with his language practices of engaging verbally with adults, using verbal clues to follow directions and sharing time with another sibling forms this portion of his literacy practices.

### **Jeffrey and reading and writing**

Jeffrey experiences reading in his home in many different ways. Both of these skills are modeled for him by his parents and step-brother. He sees Dad read the newspaper and books as well as take care of the mail. Mom reads her work documents, books, magazines, and recipes while Jeffrey observes. Step-brother and Jeffrey sat side by side at the table and worked on homework with Step-brother doing algebra and Jeffrey writing his name. Mom is home schooling Sister so there are often times when they work in workbooks and do lessons together. Mom said that they use the Mardel home school



curriculum which emphasizes phonics and sometimes Jeffrey wants to participate and work in a workbook.

There are many books in the home. They purchase books from the school book clubs such as Scholastic Firefly. They also go to the library. Mom said they go to the library once or twice a week for new books and videos. She also shared that she loved the library from experiences in her childhood. She stayed with different people growing up grandparents, other relatives, and friends. One family she stayed with would go to the library every week in the summer and they would bring home about twenty books. She remembers reading and listening to the books over and over until it was time to go back to the library. She also reminisced about reading with her Grandmother and receiving books when they went on trips or as rewards. She has carried this tradition on as she rewards Jeffrey for his behavior at school with books.

Mom places a good deal of importance on reading to Jeffrey. She says that no matter how busy they are, they strive to read to him every day and to make it a part of his life. During my visits, Mom read to both children on the couch. She sat in front of them and read to them like a teacher would were they could see the pictures as she read. Word play such as rhyming and singing is not something that Jeffrey does often at home. He does know some songs—he sang the ABCs at Wal-Mart and talked about Five Little Monkeys jumping on the bed. Reading is incorporated into the routines of the home such as bible story and bed time.

Writing is very evident in Jeffrey home literacy practices. Mom says that he loves to write on his easel. She will give him letters or words to write and he will write them and then ask her to come and look at them. This is one of the multitasking learning

opportunities mentioned earlier. Jeffrey can spell many words and loves to write numbers. He will write all of the families' names on the board and show each one where their name is written. Mom reported that he does not really like to draw pictures; however, recently he has been drawing fire trucks, which she thinks stems from the unit at school. She commented that he would rather "draw" letters and numbers. He is rewarded verbally and with tangible rewards for his writing.

Jeffrey has other opportunities to experience writing at home. He and Mom write notes to friends and family members including greeting cards and thank you notes. Mom is a list maker and often allows Jeffrey to participate in making the "to do" list or the grocery list. He enjoys holding the list at the grocery store as he and Mom gather the items. Jeffrey sees different words and letters on some of his clothes, the H on the wall, the workbooks and homework of his siblings, cereal boxes and juice boxes at the store, and the numbers and words on the television shows he enjoys watching such as Jeopardy. He does not always know what the letters spell, but he does recognize that they have a meaning and often will ask others "What does this say?"

### **Jeffrey experiences with media and technology**

Televisions, DVD players, digital cameras, cell phones, calculators, and electronic games are some of the technology that Jeffrey experiences at home. There are computers in the home, but they were not visible. Also, they were not mentioned in relation to Jeffrey's activities. Although there are televisions and DVD players in Jeffrey's room and living room, he does not focus on them. When asked if Jeffrey liked TV and movies, Mom replied "He did for a while. He is not much of a TV watcher anymore. He will watch movies if we rent a special one like...Transformers. He watched it. He is not big

on watching them.” He also is not very interested in the cell phone or digital camera. The cell phones are not shared with the children, and he doesn’t get to use the camera because Mom says it is old and too heavy. Jeffrey has a V-Tech digital game that he enjoys playing. He also likes to play on his sister’s Barbie computer game. Mom said that he was going to get a computer like game for Christmas.

*Cars* is the only movie motif that is evident in Jeffrey’s home literacy practices. He has a *Cars* back pack, a *Cars* poster, and several of the characters from the movie. He talked to me about the characters and the movie on several of my visits. Mom even used character stamps as rewards for Jeffrey’s work.

### **Jeffrey and his school experience**

“We reiterate what school teaches and school reiterates what we teach. It comes back and forth, back and forth and I see his behavior and learning has improved because of it.” This philosophy that Mom expressed summarizes Jeffrey’s home and school relationship. Mom said, “We like seeing the surprise on his face when he knows the answer and he can show us what he has learned.” Mom and Dad place importance on Jeffrey’s behavior and his skills. This is evident in the amount of time that is spent at home on school literacies such as reading and writing as well as discussing and reinforcing behavior.

Mom also stressed the importance of teachers and families developing a good relationship. Mom feels that she and Jeffrey’s teacher, Mrs. C, have this relationship and that it is very beneficial to him. She credits Mrs. C. for beginning the development of this relationship in the summer before school started. Mrs. C sent home a book about her class and the friends that he would have at school. Jeffrey and the family read this daily

until school started. Mrs. C continued the communication during the school year via email, phone calls, and a daily folder which included work and a behavior chart. Mom felt that through this and Mrs. C's involvement with Jeffrey, she knew the family and Jeffrey very well.

Mom expressed that she thinks Jeffrey also has a good relationship with Mrs. C. "He respects her. I think he respects her because we have a lot of the same traits of how we interact with Jeffrey, so he probably relates to her the most." She also shares how important this relationship is to Jeffrey's learning. "So many people put in time and effort here at school and they want him to succeed. They are patient and he senses this. You can't fool him."

Mom shows her support of Jeffrey's school experience by coming to all events including parties, field trips, special events, award assemblies, and parent conferences. She also shares her time and ideas with Mrs. C. "I am fortunate that I have the time to spend with my children, and I want to share that."

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## **Vita**

Jill Scott was born in Corpus Christi, Texas on November 25, 1952, the daughter of Edmund Lowell “Bob” and Clea Allen. After completing Mary Carroll High School, in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1970, she attended The University of Texas at Austin where she received her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Educations in 1973. She and her husband, Bruce, returned to Corpus Christi where she taught early childhood, special education, and community college classes until 2005. During that time she received her Masters of Science in Curriculum and Instruction from Corpus Christi State University in 1978. In 1995 she was named Region 2 Elementary Teacher of the Year and a Texas State finalist. In 2003 she became a National Board Certified Teacher in Special Education in 2003 and began facilitating a group of candidates working towards the National Board Certification. In 2005, she and her husband moved to Taylor, Texas where she began her doctoral work at The University of Texas at Austin. She worked as a graduate teaching assistant facilitating a cohort of pre-service teachers. For the next four years as she continued her doctoral studies and worked for the Taylor Independent School District as the campus administrator at the Northside Early Childhood Center. In 2010, she and her husband moved to Abilene, Texas where she is teaching courses at Abilene Christian University. Her children are Courtney, her husband Jeremy, and Lauren, and two grandchildren, Jackson and Emma.

Permanent Address: 2266 Continental Ave., Abilene, TX 79601

This dissertation was typed by the author.